

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

This is a service department and the people of Canada have a right to ask the government as a whole why service is not being provided. This is especially pertinent when the same minister who has such difficulty in getting the written and printed word into circulation is playing godfather to a satellite communications project which will cost this country millions of dollars. Incidentally, I am sure it will cost much more and go into orbit much later than the minister's forecast of some months ago indicated. But on the hard-pressed Post Office and the long-suffering users of the mail service, this relentless "efficiency expert" will press a pay-as-you-go policy. Up will go the cost of stamps, lock boxes, money orders, keys, and so on—upward, ever upward.

• (10:10 p.m.)

How encouraging to the Canadian people must be the utterance of the Postmaster General (Mr. Kierans) yesterday. He said:

I repeat a promise made several times before, that future rate increases will be of smaller absolute size, will be introduced with as much advance notice as possible, and will quite possibly occur with greater frequency than in the past.

In other words, there will be smaller bites but more of them. Scarcely a comforting outlook for a long suffering public, and scarcely a promise attuned to the anti-inflationary chorus which the government has been singing for these many months. All of this is to start in 1971, based apparently on the assumption that the government's pusillanimous policies will have licked inflation by then. Little wonder that the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) yesterday injected the comment that the Prime Minister, in agreeing with this assumption, could hardly have been serious. This famous quote in the speech that thrilled me so much yesterday, almost as much as the minister's review, catches the eye:

We intend to pay our way, which means that those who do not use the postal service will not be picking up the bill, through their taxes, for those who do.

This interesting declamation of the opting-out doctrine may put the Postmaster General in a new school of constitutional authorities. He has been in strange places before, but this might be a new one. I refer to the proposition that the citizen pays only for those governmental services that he uses. I trust that despite all that has happened in the last 20 months the government still admits that the Post Office should be a public service.

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

This is a formula with many intriguing possibilities. For example, the childless will be exempted from school taxes. Those who listen to private networks or local stations only will be excluded from the mammoth financial burdens that the country assumes on behalf of the CBC. Conceivably, the citizen who never used or needed police protection would opt out of contributing to the cost of maintaining our national police force, the RCMP. Such a process of selectivity of contributions to the public purse could be fascinating and would open avenues for M.A. and Ph.D. theses galore. You could opt out of this and into that. Individuality is the keynote. The resultant financial labyrinth would, however, make the white paper look like the purest of prose and the epitome of reason.

That the Post Office Department should be unique among government departments and asked to pay for itself, and it a service department, is surely something approaching absurdity. It should be efficient, of course; and at the moment it is not, nor does it seem to approach that goal. But that it must pay for itself, no matter that other aspects of governmental operation dig deeper into the treasury, is unbelievable.

It is this brittle insistence on this satus for the Post Office alone which has contributed considerably to the present plight of the minister and his department. The continuing obsession with the balance sheet, with proving the point come what may, has surely, after all these suffering months, been revealed for what it is. If before we are engulfed with greater ills we could concentrate on service instead of proving points, we might perhaps get things moving, including the mail itself.

Hon. Eric W. Kierans (Postmaster General and Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, the millifluous muse of the Conservative Party is often amusing, but he is rarely relevant and hardly ever impressive. His carping and constant criticisms are neither constructive nor do they reflect any particularly or deeply held beliefs or principles.

Yesterday I simply said to a group of the largest customers that the Canadian Post Office has, "Here are a few of the facts of life. In this day and age costs are rising. The government is determined to cut down the spiral of inflation which robs, as all of us know but few of us will admit, those who are weakest in society. It is our desire to protect them". You can cover the cost, including the