

Post Office

I would interpolate that these are not isolated cases as the Postmaster General will learn as he hears from various members during the course of today's debate.

It may happen sometimes that Canadians find that their mail has been delayed.

Even the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) discovered that on April 3 when he said everybody knows that the mail delivery in Canada is slow.

Out of 100 letters which they receive, one or two may be late. This does not mean that the postal service is bad. It means that twice out of a hundred times delivery has been delayed.

The Postmaster General has been described as a very affable and efficient sort of fellow. Perhaps he hopes to diffuse the continuing disorganization of the Post Office Department with a veneer of affability. However, a smile will not drive away the deeply rooted problems that are a part of our once efficient and adequate postal service.

I am going to review some of the difficulties that all members of parliament encounter. Other spokesmen will be specific on each of the points that I raise. I wish to point out to the Postmaster General there are real problems that have to be dealt with in a forthright manner. I suggest the reason for the decline in the efficiency of the Post Office Department in recent years came about as a result of the managerial approach or the approach of managerial expertise.

There have been many studies and analyses by various consultant groups in Canada. So many of these analyses and reports contradict one another that I am sure the Postmaster General does not know which way to turn. There has been change for the sake of change, as was the case with the Unemployment Insurance Commission which is now trying to put Humpty Dumpty together again by re-opening local offices that were once closed and trying to get the operation of the Unemployment Insurance Commission on a more intimate and efficient basis.

This change for the sake of change has been disruptive, traumatic and, in many instances, counterproductive. The Postmaster General must realize that something has to be done. We do not want a change in Postmasters General, as we had with Manpower and Immigration in order to get the mess sorted out. The Postmaster General must come to grips with these problems with more than a smile and an optimistic assurance that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Outside management was brought in from the world of business. I think this is one of the difficulties. The post office service used to operate quietly and efficiently. The people of Canada were happy with it. The letter carriers who met the public on a day-to-day basis were smiling. It is much better that they smile than the Postmaster General because they are in touch with the public on a day-to-day basis. The letter carriers are no longer the smiling, happy work force they once were.

The Post Office Department is a public service. When Mr. Kierans laid down the edict that it must pay its way, the fat was in the fire. I wonder what would happen if the same edict were laid down for the CBC, which is another form of communication, although not nearly as basic as the postal service, which is the medium of communication that really holds the fabric of the nation together.

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

Mr. Kierans said the Post Office Department had to pay its way. In order to accomplish this, he began closing rural post offices with wild abandon. No matter how many protests there were, Mr. Kierans was not slowed down in his objective of saving \$1,000 here and there. He used to boast about it. He closed down the post office in Little Snoring and saved the Canadian taxpayers \$1,000. Out of the other corner of his mouth, he was talking about the \$100 million in public funds he was going to expend on building a satellite system that would be the most impressive breakthrough in satellite technology in modern times.

Mr. Kierans failed to realize that when you close a rural post office, the very existence of that community is threatened. This is the trouble of management that is out of touch with the realities of a government that is primarily engaged in serving the public. The rural post office is generally located in the corner store. With the additional revenue gone, the corner store closes. The town begins to disintegrate further. This disastrous phenomenon of urban rural drift that all governments are concerned about at the moment goes on with increasing speed, aided and abetted by the actions of members of the government of Canada.

The amazing thing was that while Mr. Kierans was decreasing the efficiency of the service, he was increasing the postal rates in all categories by a rather alarming amount. He was aware that this would have a deleterious effect on small Canadian publications, such as church and professional group publications and weekly newspapers. Weekly newspapers, like the ethnic press, find it almost impossible to meet the sharp increase in rates in that category which amounts in some instances to as much as 1,000 per cent. It must be pointed out once again that these publications are the real grass root publications by means of which a sense of belonging, of national unity and Canadianism is promoted. We know now what has happened. Many of these publications have gone out of business with highly regrettable consequences.

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The solution to all these difficulties was to have been mechanization, computerisation and automation. Canada's mail was to be handled on the basis of coding and computerisation. But the managerial experts forgot that machines will not function successfully unless they are properly monitored by employees. And when the post office set up a wage category for this work which was lower than that applicable to postal workers engaged in normal sorting procedures—\$2.90 an hour as compared with \$3.64—it automatically created a source of discontent which has resulted in a sad decline in the morale and efficiency of the work force. These are all shortcomings to which attention has been called many times, Mr. Speaker. The minister tells us now they are all in the past and that solutions are forthcoming to all these problems.

I should like to point to one or two current incidents which suggest that his optimism is a case of whistling in the graveyard, and that he is still in great difficulty as far as complaints about the postal service are concerned. Service in the post office is still erratic. Only the other day the following letter appeared in the *Edmonton Journal*:

I should like to draw to your readers' attention the folly of the new postal code which we have been asked to adopt. I used it recently when writing to a correspondent in Raymond which is