

Post Office Act

about that increase in rates. It should have been doing away back, when there were high employment levels as the result of Conservative government policies, what it is seeking to do now.

The minister has also received a number of recommendations, such as the Montpetit report. Some of these ought to be implemented in order to make the department more efficient, so that we may have happier people in the public service. We should look into these reports before reducing services. As I said before, we now have less service for which we are paying more.

I now wish to read these few sentences from "Sound Off" by Gordon Sanderson:

What's happening to the mail service in this country?

Every week Sound Off investigates problems that have arisen between customers and firms which are traceable to the same cause: "We didn't get the letter."

This can be a pat excuse for internal inefficiency in some firms. Incorrectly addressed mail may also be responsible. The post office is unjustly blamed for much that is not its doing.

Yet how does the post office explain cases of registered mail going astray or correctly addressed letter and pension cheques being delivered to the wrong house?

It would be unfair to make a blanket condemnation of letter carriers or the whole system, but complaints about lost or undelivered mail—once a rarity—are becoming numerous enough to shake public confidence and trust in this most essential government service.

Before raising rates and allowing old inefficiencies to continue the government ought to examine the workings of the department. The government's attitudes towards raising rates is wrong, and I want to explain why I think it is wrong. First, the post office of Canada is a government monopoly. It is a government service and there is no competition. Businessmen, industrialists, farmers, and householders must accept what the government offers, or go without. That in itself may breed inefficiencies. The department is a monopoly that is supported by the people. I therefore think that the government is under an obligation to provide the people with the highest possible level of service.

The government refused to pay the rural mail carriers for being on stand-by during the last postal strike. I am glad to learn that the minister has changed his mind in some aspects of the matter. I ask, why should the letter carriers not be paid? This is the government that is to spend \$50 million on an arts centre

in Ottawa. Few from my constituency will attend any performances at the arts centre, but nearly all of them will feel the pinch from the increased postal rates. The minister's attitude toward the rural mail carriers was that he would not pay them for six days work when they worked only five days. I think he has changed his mind. Has anyone noticed the ministerial attendance roster? The ministers work in the house on three days a week, yet they all expect to be paid for a full week.

Mr. Perrault: That is a ridiculous statement to make.

Mr. McKinley: The roster is right in front of us.

The minister has changed his attitude, and I am glad. The rural mail carriers in my riding are not organized into a union, but they have a contract with the government which they expect the government to honour. It has been said that rural mail routes are to be amalgamated. It seems to me this would not save a great deal of money and that it would have the effect of putting some mail carriers out of work. In addition, some of the mail would take longer to deliver.

● (8:50 p.m.)

I am glad to know that the Postmaster General has himself lived in a rural area. I ask him to put himself in the position of some of these people who will be deprived of certain services and who will have to pay higher rates. I should like to think that he will take note of what has been said during the debate and consider having this bill sent to a committee, as hon. members have proposed. I well remember the transport bill which was considered in committee with extreme thoroughness, and was reported back with some 70 amendments. I maintain we should have a chance to listen to those whose interests will be seriously affected by this measure, and give it a thorough examination in order to make sure that it will do what is intended without causing extreme hardship to anyone.

Mr. Rod Thomson (Battleford-Kindersley): Mr. Speaker, when I listened to the minister's very adequate address this afternoon I could not but think that neither sleet nor storm nor dark of night would stop the mail from going through. I also got the impression that, regardless of sleet or storm or dark of night, it would go through at much higher cost to those who were paying the shot.