

Post Office Act

departments of government? Has every operation of the department been thoroughly studied, and the waste and fat cut out? I will be the first to admit that costs have gone up—and this seems to be a way of life under this government.

As a businessman, however, I also know there is no pat answer to eliminating a deficit. It is fine to say, "I will just raise my price". I believe the Postmaster General (Mr. Kierans) will agree, however, that it is equally important to re-examine operating expenses, to eliminate unnecessary expenditures, but without reducing the quality of the service you are giving your customers. This is why we, on this side of the house, have proposed that this bill be referred to a standing committee, where the whole operation of the department can be analysed and suggestions made to eliminate any unnecessary expenditures, to develop and promote new sources of revenue and new types of service.

Many suggestions have just been made by my colleague the hon. member for Wellington (Mr. Hales) and I feel these are worthy of consideration. If this bill is pushed through the house in its present form, it will mean reduced service for large sections of the Canadian public, especially the rural mail subscriber who cannot afford to pay the increased subscription rates that will result. In my opinion, this is just another in a series of retrograde measures by which the post office has steadily cut down its service to the Canadian people. In no other field have Canadians experienced so drastic a reduction in service, coupled with an enormous increase in rates. In no other field do Canadians pay so much more for so much less.

If this bill becomes law, Canadians, in this age of expansion and acceleration, in this swinging society, will end up with a mail service that is slower, less frequent and less convenient than that enjoyed by a previous generation in the horse and buggy age. In return for this service, we will be asked to pay an exorbitant rate which has increased in inverse proportions to the service provided. One cannot help but wonder if the post office millenium will be no mail delivery at all, at enormous public expense.

Some of the statements made by the Postmaster General in support of this bill have been confusing, to put it charitably. Last week, in answer to a question in this house he said, as reported at page 1150 of *Hansard*:

—our present subsidy to newspaper publishers amounts to approximately \$37 million.

[Mr. Thomas (Moncton).]

• (4:50 p.m.)

I have tried, Mr. Speaker, but I cannot understand this statement. Surely the minister will admit that if any subsidy is involved it is being given to the rural mail subscriber, not the publisher.

Let me quote from an editorial in the *Moncton Transcript* for Wednesday, October 16. This editorial is captioned "Let's keep the record straight!", and is as follows:

In order for the publisher to receive the subsidy, he would have to charge the rural mail subscriber the same as the carrier delivered subscriber and pocket the difference between what it cost to deliver by mail and by carrier. But this he does not do and Mr. Kierans does not seem to understand this fact.

This is not an isolated editorial opinion. The implication is plain: if this bill passes and the so-called subsidy is reduced, any increase in mailing costs will be passed on to the subscriber in the form of increased rates, though these higher rates will still not meet the increased cost of delivery. We have heard various estimates of increased cost, some being as high as 400 per cent, but it seems fair to say that the increases will be so great that subscription rates will be raised by as much as 40 per cent. This could mean a drastic drop in rural subscribers, with severe effects on weekly papers and those dailies which have a large rural subscriber list.

The *Globe and Mail* for Friday, October 11, reported that this could be a death blow to such papers. It could mean that papers of this type would no longer effectively cover rural Canada. This would be another of those retrograde steps to which I referred earlier; and if the reduction of the so-called subsidy to the rural subscriber puts the price of the newspaper beyond his reach, the government alone must bear full responsibility.

I find it hard to accept the position that the rural mail subscriber must pay the whole shot for his daily or weekly newspaper. Does not the fact that the government is prepared to pay the deficit of the C.B.C. out of general revenue establish the principle that the right to be informed in this country does not have to be borne by the individual alone? Why should there be a distinction between different forms of news dissemination? The hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) has expressed this very well, and I echo his sentiments.

Running all through the defence of this bill by hon. members on the government side of the house, Mr. Speaker, is the inference that the effect of the legislation will be to soak the