

There can be no doubt that almost every innovation, announced with fanfare as an important measure to increase efficiency, decreased efficiency.

The assured mail program about which we have heard so much is one such scheme which has been very seriously overrated. In order to obtain assured mail service it is necessary to post a letter before eleven o'clock in the morning, then you are assured that it will get to its destination some time the following afternoon, from certain selected centres. Years ago anybody posting a first-class letter considered that there was an assurance of that sort of service. Certainly, in the province of Nova Scotia we considered ourselves assured of that kind of service.

But what in fact does it mean, if it is necessary for a person to post a letter before eleven o'clock in the morning? It is difficult for any business office to arrange to have a letter dictated, typed, signed by the person sending it and deposited in the postal repository by eleven o'clock in the morning. In fact, that situation pretty well eliminates getting a letter dictated and sent within one day. Of course, the next day, if the letter arrives after three o'clock in the afternoon, it is difficult to have it dealt with effectively, particularly if federal government offices close at four o'clock in the afternoon. It is pretty difficult for any government office or business office to deal with a letter meaningfully in an hour or so with such a deadline imposed.

Again, there is the question of five-day service. I recognize that it was not trumpeted by the postal department, but I wonder what will happen now, since there is talk that the unions are putting on a drive for a four-day work week. Will we be faced with a four-day delivery program? As I understand the situation at present, when one posts a letter from central Canada to Winnipeg, if the letter is sent from Ottawa on Wednesday it may not be delivered in Winnipeg until the following Tuesday. If it is handled here on Thursday, by the time it is sorted and reaches Winnipeg it will be the following Monday. But the five-day week in Winnipeg is arranged so that Monday is not worked. This means delivery takes place on Tuesday. Such variations in the five-day work week across the country bring results such as that.

The five-day delivery program is one aspect of the matter, but the five-day work week is another aspect in terms of handling, transmitting and sorting the mail. It compounds the difficulties and increases the restrictions placed upon people in attempting to deliver mail at a particular time. I am sure the Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) has heard informed people talking of letters being sent from one place to another and taking an unduly long time to be delivered. I shall not deal with that, although I might mention a couple of interesting examples.

● (1650)

There is another aspect of Post Office activity with which I want to deal. It concerns non-postal activities of the post office. If I understood correctly, the Postmaster general has serious doubts about whether the Post Office is legally authorized to carry on certain non-postal activities. Certainly, the people in my riding have serious doubts about the propriety of these activities. The book stores are concerned about them and the knick-knack

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shops are concerned, because the Post Office is in competition with them. The Post Office is established with public funds, yet employees, presumably in their spare time—I suppose it is spare time, because when they work they are supposed to work for the Post Office Department—engage in these activities.

Presumably, the spare time of postal clerks is used in selling, say, special spoons, wrappers for packages, labels, commemorative coins and that sort of thing. They do that when they are free from their necessary duties. At the same time, they do not pay overheads but are in direct competition with private individuals who are in business and trying to make a profit from the sale of similar commodities.

The same might be said about the philatelic service. There has been controversy over the postal service being involved in the philatelic service. It is said the department does not compete fairly with others in that service, that post offices need not pay postage while private individuals attempting to cater to their clients must pay postage. There is also a certain amount of disappointment on the part of philatelists with regard to the efficiency of service, which I am informed leaves much to be desired. I am informed of instances of funds having been held back for a considerable length of time and stamps which have been requested not being supplied. There are instances involving wrong stamps being issued and the miscounting of stamps.

Because the Post Office Department has gone into this sort of business it has been subject to a good deal of the criticism that perhaps a private individual might expect in the normal course of business. That is one kind of criticism which the department need not invite, and it is one area of activity in which the department need not be involved.

Mr. Thomas S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni): Mr. Speaker, while listening to the hon. member for Athabasca (Mr. Yewchuk) talk about places in the country where apparently there is no postal service or mail delivery, I recalled a similar discussion of a few years ago involving one of the minister's predecessors who was later elevated to lieutenant governor of the province from which he came and who was, I was going to say, on the mat. As a matter of fact, he was on the mat, because we were debating item 1 of the estimates of the minister and instead of being able to sit here placidly and appear to listen, the minister had to answer our questions on the spot.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hear, hear!

Mr. Barnett: It seems to me that that debate concerned the level of postal services in this country. In such debates we tend to concentrate on the postmaster general and consider postal services, as it were, in a vacuum without considering some of the basic facts with which I have become familiar as a result of representing a coastal section of Canada which according to some is one of the most difficult places in the country to serve. I am referring to the means of transporting mail. I suggest we cannot consider postal service and say whether it is good, bad or indifferent without also considering transportation services in this country. Then we were bragging about ours