

Postal Rates

Mr. Peters: If hon. members think that is untrue I will let them have a copy of the *Nugget*. Perhaps the hon. member does not read his home newspaper. An article in that paper indicated that the only department in North Bay that did not use courier service was the Department of Veterans Affairs, and even employees in that department said they did not think they did; they had considered it and decided against it. We as veterans have always waited a long time so we have not really pushed for faster service. Business people have pushed for faster service and take advantage of courier service.

What I am saying is that I think most people in this country would not be opposed to paying 17 cents for the expeditious delivery of a letter. However, a first-class letter cannot be handled expeditiously if it is going to be included with parcels, third-class mail, flyers and all that junk mail that people receive. That junk mail is delivered as fast as first-class.

There was a time when all the mail in a district post office had to be dealt with on the day of receipt. What the employees did was take all the mail left over at night, bag it and send it to another distribution point in the same part of the country. That meant that the mail would perhaps go to North Bay for redistribution. If it was left over that night in North Bay it would perhaps be sent to Timmins. If they could not handle it they bagged it and sent it back to North Bay. Often it was the middle of the week before that mail was handled at the original district office.

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If I can find a way to send a letter from Ottawa to northern Ontario within 15 hours, then why does the Post Office take so long? I think it is up to us. I think we have allowed them to put all of the junk mail together. This brochure points out that they are handling many hundreds of tons of mail a shift, but that is not first class mail. It is true many organizations send out their junk mail. That is part of their business procedure. However, they are not paying to send out first class mail, yet they have their junk mail delivered just as fast as any other mail.

Mr. Rodriguez: What about the householders?

Mr. Peters: There is nothing more important than householder mail for members of Parliament. I hope that it is always in white envelopes and mailed in the most expeditious way. I am afraid that it does not matter whether it is packaged mail or parcelled mail because there is no such thing as preferential treatment.

If the government wishes to improve the mail, it should not be misguided by Post Office officials. It should not be misguided by my friend or the workers in the Post Office. The government wants to make the Post Office a Crown corporation. I do not want it made a Crown corporation until it is cleaned up. I am of the opinion that if the Post Office is made a Crown corporation, with the mess it is in today it is merely transferring the problem and calling it something else. The Post Office must be cleaned up, and as a department of the government it would not be very difficult to clean it up.

I know that the minister has been critical of the way the Post Office operates and of the staff, both union and managerial. These are things which can be corrected. The system can be adapted to where it is again sorting out mail so that those who are paying for first class mail will be guaranteed first class delivery. It is not for the Post Office to set up additional courier service to the 17 or 18 national courier services which are now in business. I know that the Post Office is contemplating this idea, and I believe they are experimenting with it.

I believe that we can design a system by using the means which are available to us in this very large country for moving mail expeditiously. If first class mail has a premium price, it should be given a premium position in the delivery system. If we can guarantee to businessmen that the post office will deliver the mail, it is a step in the right direction.

I am sure that the present mail service affects all members of Parliament. How many members in this House have been faced with the problem of getting a passport to someone in a very short period of time? In the first place, you do not want them to send the information by mail because it will never get there, so an alternative means must be found, usually by air. To ship a passport by air to Toronto costs \$25, and to send it by bus costs \$2.75. Surely the Post Office can find a way of supplying that kind of service at a more reasonable price and with the same guarantee of delivery. That is what the Post Office is for.

I am sure that all hon. members will remember as children hearing the saying "the mail must go through", and remember seeing the man on horseback delivering the mail. If we were still using that method the mail would probably still be getting there. It is not the fault of the employees. The Post Office has a very large network of employees, and not all of them are working in terminals. The employees working in the terminals are probably going crazy because they are dictated to by the machine which they are trying to operate.

Those people who deliver mail by truck, aeroplane or on the rural delivery systems all across this country make the effort. I am sure that you, Mr. Speaker, live in a rural area the same as I, and that you can say as well as I can that there are very few days in the year when the rural delivery man does not make every effort to drive on every back road on his route to deliver the mail. That employee makes the effort, and the government and members of government are not making the effort to provide that employee with the mail to be delivered in a reasonable period of time to the people for whom they are responsible.

Guaranteed mail delivery may have to cost more than 17 cents, but I am sure that it will not cost as much as what the bus company charges, and certainly not as much as what a courier service charges. I am also sure that the minister can do these things under the auspices of the Canadian postal service. It is something which the minister can aim for, and I will not oppose him, when he comes back in a few months—after he has had a chance to get rid of most of the bottleneck which occurs in the distribution centres—in his efforts to get first-