

*Post Office Act*

many questions to be answered and we have no opportunity to ask them in the house. We were given this white paper and told: Here it is; I ask you to accept it.

No opportunity has been provided which would enable members to address questions to departmental officials. Neither is there any opportunity, really, for research to be undertaken; the opposition is not equipped with the type of research facilities available to the officials of the hon. gentleman's department. Yet we are asked to accept this document without question. As I say, we have all received briefs. But we have not had a chance to pool them all and discuss them thoroughly. So, I say again that I find it hard to understand why the minister is not willing to allow this important bill to be sent to a committee.

I have a few other observations to make. First of all, I should like to congratulate the minister on the freshness of his approach to the Post Office Department, the zeal, drive and initiative which he has brought to that department. I sincerely hope that this initiative, this great spirit of his, will permeate right down through the ranks to the men who deliver the mail at our doors. I congratulate the hon. gentleman on instilling this fresh outlook into the department.

By the same token I am rather surprised that the minister, who has had a tremendous background in the business world, and who has made an outstanding success of a private business he operated, should have introduced into this house the idea that you can charge more and provide less service. This seems an unusual idea to come from a man who was professor of economics, or director of the school of commerce at McGill University. I cannot imagine any company or corporation which was engaged in any competition whatsoever, proposing to raise its prices and give less service at the same time. But this is what the postmaster is asking us to accept. Can you imagine, for instance, the Ottawa Transportation Commission raising its fares and at the same time taking buses off the routes, or abandoning routes altogether? It is hard to imagine anything like that happening.

I congratulate the minister upon incorporating into this bill some of the recommendations made by the public accounts committee. These recommendations were made time and time again, but it has taken this new postmaster to incorporate them in a bill. One of the recommendations was that second class mail rates should be increased in order that

[Mr. Hales.]

the post office might at least break even in this operation, while not necessarily showing a profit.

Then again, there was the suggestion by the committee—it was a suggestion rather than a recommendation—that the post office savings department be abolished. There was a third suggestion or recommendation to the effect that the Post Office Department be made into a crown corporation. I am sorry the minister has not taken this suggestion under serious consideration and recommended making a crown corporation out of the post office. Had he introduced a bill along these lines I believe it would have proceeded satisfactorily, and that the post office would have been placed on a sound, businesslike basis, with all the political atmosphere taken out of it.

What has happened in the last three years? How serious is this financial loss of which the minister speaks? Only three short years ago the post office showed a profit of \$20 million. Even after deducting sums in respect of services supplied by other government departments, and adding a credit in respect of franked mail, the deficit amounted to only \$11.5 million. The deduction included sums in respect of rents for accommodation supplied by the Public Works Department, a charge for accounting and technical services, contributions for superannuation, the Canada Pension Plan, and employees' compensation. Added on the credit side was \$4.3 million in respect of franked mail sent by the departments and by members of parliament.

• (4:00 p.m.)

What has happened in such a short time? I realize costs have gone up. I appreciate the circumstances which have followed the settlement of the strike. But surely this does not account for the \$100 million that the Postmaster General is talking about. Post office sales have gone up considerably during the last three years. Why should we be talking in terms of a \$100 million deficit? Is the Postmaster General tacking on millions of dollars for depreciation of equipment? Is he adding on service charges for other departments? These are some of the questions we would like to ask in committee.

The other day I read in a newspaper that a Union Nationale frontbencher in the Quebec legislature nicknamed our Postmaster General a lemon squeezer. Here he is still squeezing lemons. This might be justified, but he is suggesting rates that, from what we have