

*Post Office Act*

The honourable member for Gaspé and his 35 liberal colleagues have changed their mind within a few hours. However, that is no reason why we, from the opposition should allow the minister to push the rate increase through because we believe that such a step is not justified under the circumstances and that it is going to encourage the increases in the cost of living and inflation.

We are already facing a serious inflation problem in this country. Yet, the government had promised us to take the necessary measures to check inflation, and if the member for Trois-Rivières will follow my reasoning, he will find that if postal rates are increased, the consumer will again foot the bill instead of publishers who will pass on the increase to the consumer. If the consumer has less money to spend and if the price of a product keeps increasing, the member for Trois-Rivières knows perfectly well that inflation will follow.

The measure proposed by the minister is an inflationary one, and considering the economic and financial circumstances now prevailing in the country, the Canadian people cannot afford to support such a measure which, I think, will contribute to increase the cost of living.

Of course, the hon. members have informed the house of the representations they had received. I am convinced that the members of the government as well as those of the opposition have received representations from almost all the newspapers, which complained to the minister and even met him. I shall spare the minister the reading of the brief which has been presented to him, since I am convinced he has read and reread it. This brief informed the minister that the increase was too high under the circumstances. Taxation experts have suggested that the minister might consider, with the officials of his Department, the steps to be taken in order to meet the objectives of the Post Office Department and satisfy, at the same time, the publishers. Those same publishers have met the minister as well as other ministers from Quebec and it seems that their meeting did not give the expected results.

And I think that the present government has not only the right but the obligation to receive and to study thoroughly the claims or briefs submitted last week by some organizations.

If the minister is able to stand up for his bill and all its financial implications, I ask him why he is reluctant to comply with the

request of the opposition to refer the bill to a committee, which would give the opposition the opportunity to hear the evidence and to discuss with the people and the organizations involved. Indeed, the minister might even have the pleasant surprise, at the conclusion of such discussions in committee, to find that we can reach an agreement, which would perhaps help him to find a solution to his problem, while at the same time doing justice to the people who feel the rate increase proposed by the minister is unacceptable at the present time.

Mr. Speaker, the minister will understand that we cannot accept his bill as easily as a letter in the mail.

I now revert to the remark I made at the beginning. The minister knows very well, since he has been a member, and even a minister, in a provincial legislature, that when a bill is introduced in the house, proof ought to be given that such bill is a must, and the only way the minister can get his department out of a fix. It is not incumbent on us to show the minister that he is wrong, but upon the minister to demonstrate that the whole undertaking is reasonable and that the legislation he is trying to pass at present is the only one that can solve the problem.

And in this respect, the minister will agree with me that he could have explored many other avenues, instead of following blindly reports from officials telling him: Sir, you can make up the deficits of certain periods of the year only by increasing the rates, whatever the consequences might be from the social or financial standpoints. It is obvious that the officials are not close to the people and that they are unaware of their hardships. However, it is still the minister's responsibility to analyse the advice given to him by his officials so as to know, under these circumstances, whether the legislation is doing a service to the Canadian people.

The minister should at least consider the advisability of exempting religious publications and granting subsidies to certain associations such as the War Amputees of Canada. Today we received a brief from that organization to the effect that it will have to close its doors and stop publishing if the minister applies the legislation as he intends to do now, with the increases he wants parliament to accept. The War Amputees Association deserves all our sympathy. Here are people who have found themselves a job in spite of their war disabilities. Everyone knows what those people do to earn a living.