

Postal service in Canada has been going downhill steadily for the past ten years. Immediate steps must be taken to restore the system to its former efficiency. If I were the head of a Canadian government and wanted by one single act to win back public confidence in parliament and the government, I would take every step necessary to restore the postal system to its former efficiency.

Complaints about inefficiency of the post office are too numerous to be dismissed as normal weeping and wailing. Each of us has a list of examples of horror stories. Because of the frustration surrounding the delivery of weekly papers in my constituency via second class mail, my office sends a supply of first class envelopes to the circulation departments of the newspapers which kindly print my column regularly. This is a convenience which is available to me as a member of parliament. Mailing privileges ensure that communication is maintained with my constituents. The parliamentary reading room subscribes to an airmail copy of the *Edmonton Journal*, and reasonably good service usually is available. But even so, the papers occasionally arrive at least four or five days late.

This is not an attack on the efficiency and dedication of smaller post offices and rural carriers in Pembina and other parts of Canada. I can testify to many acts of kindness and neighbourliness which are performed without fanfare by numerous rural mail drivers.

What bothers me is that, despite increased mechanization and increased rates of all classes of mail, the delays are getting longer. Many people have dropped subscriptions to magazines because they are stale before they reach their destination. In addition to public frustration, many business people are taking drastic action and have stopped using post office facilities. They are transferring their patronage to the new private courier service which has sprung up to fill the vacuum. A front page story in the *Financial Post* indicated that millions of dollars of potential post office revenue is being diverted to private parcel and letter carriers because these companies can offer the one thing the post office apparently cannot—reliability. What a sad abdication of responsibility by a once proud service which 50 years ago inaugurated airmail service down the mighty Mackenzie River delta because the horses and dog sleds took too long.

The post office used to rank with the armed forces and the Department of Transport as a basic function of government, a visible and tangible return for our taxes. Although breaking even was a goal of the post office, it was never a primary obligation. As citizens we expected service paid for in part when we bought postage stamps, with the balance coming from the general revenues of the government. I cannot believe there are not thousands of dedicated postal employees who have a sense of duty to get the mail to its destination. Unhappily, their ethic is not shared by all of their colleagues.

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It is both sad and paradoxical that, in an age when almost anything seems possible, a basic right of citizenship—an efficient postal system—is beyond the competence of this govern-

ment. The Progressive Conservative party is dedicated, in the event that we form the government after the next election, to offering the Canadian people an efficient postal system.

A chap who is running for our party during the next election, Mr. Ron Ritchie, recently conducted an inquiry into Canada's postal service. I wish to share with the House at this time recommendations brought forward by Mr. Ritchie. Among them there was recommended a return to purchasing services from the private sector for the pick-up and distribution of mail in major urban centres and consideration of the cost and advantages of other private sector contract operations.

A second recommendation was that the responsibilities and authority for providing mail services to the Canadian public should be given to a Crown corporation.

He recommended that the package of wage, salary and other benefits for Canada Post employees should not exceed those in the private sector so that appropriate comparisons might be made.

His next recommendation was that strikes by Canada Post employees should be illegal and we should provide conciliation and arbitration mechanisms and procedures for settlement of normally bargainable issues. He also suggested that maximum postal rates should be approved by a regulatory authority designated for this purpose.

It should be remembered that these recommendations were brought before our party for discussion and are not necessarily representative of policy.

When one considers the situation as it has been in the post office over the past ten years, one will find we have had seven different postmasters general. Is it any wonder that the individuals who are employed in this department of government are not concerned about the directions they are receiving? They have gone through four deputy ministers, and the post office deficit has undergone a 750 per cent increase in the ten-year period from 1968 to 1978. The deficit has risen from \$67 million in 1968 to \$567 million in 1978. Next year it is expected to go to some \$650 million. This is not very comfortable to the Canadian taxpayers.

Hon. J.-Gilles Lamontagne (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, I have already replied, on March 10, to the hon. member for Pembina (Mr. Elzinga) on the subject of the letter carrier freeze. I will be pleased, however, to expand upon my remarks at this time but avoid getting drawn into a debate on the efficiency of our post office, which is improving constantly despite our numerous problems.

I am very conscious of the fact that I have a great responsibility to provide Canadians with a high standard of mail delivery service. I am also very conscious of the fact that door to door delivery has existed for a long time and the public has grown to accept this service as a matter of course. Furthermore, I believe that every member of the House will agree that the letter carrier has a very high reputation and is recognized as a friend in every neighbourhood, and we have great collaboration and understanding from their union, the LCUC.