

Post Office

Urge". Unhappily, nothing has happened since that time to change the Lemming-like rush of the Post Office to self-destruction that Bryce Mackasey describes so vividly in that book.

An hon. Member: "Lemon" or "lemming"?

Mr. Dinsdale: Lemming. Little creatures all proceeding rank upon rank toward the precipice of destruction. I am going to quote from the minister's comments today to demonstrate that what I am saying is confirmed by some of the points he made. The Postmaster General said that there is a growing deficit in the Post Office Department, with decreasing revenues, and decreasing volume.

The decline of one million pieces in the forecast volume of mail, and the drop in parcel volumes to the level of twenty years ago, are symptoms of major problems in the Post Office. Surely they are indices that something is drastically wrong, when parcel post service is down to the level of twenty years ago, notwithstanding merchandising gimmicks such as postpak and mechanization at the Gateway plant at Mississauga that was supposed to increase volume and thereby improve the financial position of the Post Office Department.

I suggest to the Postmaster General that infusions of additional cash by frequent increases in postal rates is dealing with the symptoms rather than the disease.

Along with internal malaise, the postal service is faced with serious external threats. The Postmaster General refers to electronic communication as already undergoing embryonic growth. That is the phrase which I abstracted from his statement today. Surely he must be aware that this technology is now in place and Canada is poised for the great leap forward. If permission were given to allow electronic fund transfers, such as bills, cheques, bank statements and transactions of that kind, both in the private and the public sector, 70 per cent of mail volume would be lost—and already the forecast volume is down by one million pieces. Surely this is a state of affairs in the Post Office Department that requires more than periodic rate increases, as has been the action taken under the mandate of the present incumbent.

An hon. Member: Go back to the pony express.

Mr. Dinsdale: I further point out, Mr. Speaker, that this technology is in operation in West Germany, as I discovered during a fact-finding visit to Germany in September, along with the hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka. We also discovered another significant piece of information with respect to Canada's problem. Because of the boom in electronic communication which the hon. gentleman says is in its embryonic state in Canada—I am sure he does not mean that—West Germany has frozen further mechanization and automation in their service. They have only five or six plants automated, because they have stopped the whole process of automation and mechanization.

An even more disturbing piece of information we gleaned was that they have sold to Canada some of their surplus

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

Telefunken equipment which was intended for domestic use in Germany. Canada has been moving post-haste—if I can use that word with respect to the Post Office—in recent years to totally and completely mechanize their postal operation. I am sure it occurs to the hon. gentleman that Canada can be locked into an expensive program of mechanization and automation just at a time when electronic communication has rendered that program obsolete. It is going to require a lot of sober second thought with respect to the solutions which management must decide upon in order to solve the growing problems of Post Office service.

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It should be noted that one of the major reasons for confrontation in labour-management relations is the automation program which was foisted upon the inside workers without prior consultation or knowledge. The information was passed on in the form of Comteam bulletins, but that was after the fact. In the United Kingdom they were unable to proceed with mechanization until labour and management were brought together, along with the postal users, thus proving that these tremendous challenges being felt in all democratic countries can be solved constructively and positively.

Our attitude has been positive throughout this long, continuing debate. In face of the forces which are threatening to destroy Canada's postal service, the Postmaster General was scheduled to make a speech to the postal users' conference last year. It was the best of his speeches I have read, and I wish he would accept its authorship. He recognized that the current trends will be insurmountable unless we come to grips with them very quickly.

We in the official opposition believe it is possible to restore the Post Office to its former efficiency. From time to time we have put forward specific recommendations. From what has been said here today, it is obvious that an independent investigation of the Post Office must be undertaken immediately. Surely that is elementary. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers called for a royal commission last spring. Almost simultaneously the official opposition recommended a parliamentary committee investigation which would achieve more immediate results.

The problem is so urgent that immediate decisions must be made. The investigation should consider the issue of transforming the Post Office into a Crown corporation. This change would make it easier to introduce modern industrial relations into the Post Office, thereby helping to avoid the confrontation which exists between CUPW and management. This is one of the main causes of the deterioration of the postal service. This fundamental and essential service cannot face repeated strikes without destroying the reputation, efficiency and reliability of the Post Office.

The Postmaster General pointed out that co-operation has been achieved between management and the Letter Carriers Union of Canada. They are not in the front line of the impact of mechanization because they do not work directly in the plants affected. The same spirit of co-operation which is now