

Postal Service Policies

Toronto—and ministers from these two areas dominate the cabinet—but it means quite another thing to people living in the Northwest Territories, in the northern parts of the Prairies, Newfoundland, and even the more distant parts of Ontario and Quebec. In small centres of population the post office is often the centre of the community. It is the place where people meet and communicate in ways other than by letter. In removing these post offices we are removing part of our way of life, and I do not think that is necessarily wise.

● (3:50 p.m.)

I have here a letter written to me by one of my constituents. I will refer to it briefly and then go on with the main part of my remarks. The letter points out what it costs rural people to get their newspapers. The letter comes from the rural part of my constituency, from a village called Embro. I expect hon. members will want to know the author's name. It is a Mr. Usher. He says that before 1968 he had to pay \$22 a year to receive the local morning paper, the *London Free Press*, but with the new postal rates introduced by the minister the cost has increased to \$44 a year.

Mr. Dinsdale: No wonder there is inflation.

Mr. Nesbitt: Moreover, it is \$44 a year payable in advance. What has happened there may not mean too much to people living in Montreal or Toronto; they could not care less. But for elderly people with not too much income, especially elderly people in the rural areas, doubling the cost of the daily paper works a great hardship. People like to know what is going on in the world. They like to read daily newspapers. In our part of the country we are flooded with United States radio programs.

Although the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Greene) said he was going to jam the airwaves along the border, or some such nonsense, nevertheless it is a good idea for people in our part of the country who live near the border to have access to Canadian news. Their access to it should not be denied by a doubling of the rates. This constituent also pointed out that a number of rural carriers were able to deliver the paper in their personal capacity while delivering mail and that the problem was being circumvented in that way. Frankly, I cannot understand the minister's argument that rates for newspapers have to be so high.

I know that the minister at various times has put forward the pious philosophy that those who use the mails must pay for them. That sort of idea is pretty good if you run a dime store, say, but not otherwise. He said the government's objective is to make the Post Office Department pay its own way without subsidization. Sooner or later it may even become a Crown corporation. Well, saying that the postal service should pay its way may be the minister's point of view but it is not my point of view. I am not saying that it should not do as well as is reasonable, and reasonably pay its way, but we must consider what is the purpose and objective of the postal service in Canada.

It is my understanding, from reading Canadian history and listening to expressions of policy by the representatives of all parties in this House, that it is traditional that Canadians must not be discriminated against in essential government services merely because they live in remote parts of the country or even rural parts of the country. This is part of the cost of keeping Canada together. We are a very large country and, as we know, a great country and part of the cost of keeping our country together, of expanding it, exploring and opening it up is the providing of equal service for all parts of the country and discriminating against no one, no matter whether the people live in the far north, Newfoundland, northern British Columbia or the remoter parts of Ontario or Quebec. This principle applies to other services and has been followed as fully as possible in our railway services. It is certainly followed in that other form of communication, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which is subsidized to the tune of \$160 million a year.

I and a great many members of this House would like to know the answer to this question: Why is the postal service, which is essentially a means of communication in Canada, being treated differently from means of communication such as the CBC, Canadian National Railways, or means of communication which are privately owned such as the CPR and Telecommunications? This is the big question. What is happening seems very strange to me. One has to guess what lies behind government policy. The government does not impart the motives for its behaviour to members of the opposition, so that one has to guess. Why does the CBC get special treatment, the subsidy of \$160 million a year? It seems strange. In some ways the CBC is not