

Post Office Act

be abundantly clear and obvious. There are so many inconsistencies in the legislation that has been brought before us that we must, if we are to have any sort of policy that makes sense or any amendments that make sense, refer this matter to a committee so that we may have the necessary dialogue between those of the body public who have been raising the issues and members of parliament who have the responsibility to bring about legislation that is in the best interests of Canada as a whole.

● (3:50 p.m.)

The main point the Postmaster General made in his presentation yesterday in defence of the amendments was that since there has been such a long delay in making amendments to the act increases in rates are necessary. But associated with that basic point was what the hon. member for Hillsborough termed a double whammy. We are to have an increase in rates and a decrease in services. No wonder the Canadian public has become confused.

No one will deny that there must be some increase in rates, if only to meet the problems caused by the rising cost of living in this country. It was mentioned, for instance, that there has been no change in second class mail rates since 1951 and no change in first class mail rates since 1954. In the interval the cost of living in this country has increased substantially and we are today feeling the continuing effects of what is sometimes called liberal inflation. I am sure this will be demonstrated when the budget comes down tonight because since 1963 we have experienced an inflationary trend that, without exaggeration, may be described as runaway inflation. The cost of everything has gone up. All the staples of life, bread, butter, milk, transportation rates and so on, have become more expensive.

In this house recently we have been preoccupied with the matter of increasing interest rates generally, which would add to the cost of living. So strong did the outcries and protests by Canadian consumers become that the government established a special department to deal with those protests, the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. The establishment of that department will add to the increasing costs of government, one of the main contributors to the rising cost of living. This all relates to the general problem of fiscal mismanagement over recent years.

While we admit that there is a necessity for increased postal rates, the arbitrary manner

in which the problem has been approached by the minister is not, I think, in the best interests of participatory democracy. The original bill brought before the house in the last parliament dealt with an increase in rates without all the other drastic changes which have been introduced. Without labouring the matter I think it is crystal clear to the people of Canada and, surely, to all members of the house and to the minister that we shall obtain a much more effective reorganization of the department if hon. members have a chance to look at the matter in depth in committee.

It was mentioned that the post office savings bank is to be discontinued. This is an obvious change. I do not think that the Canadian public, following the announcement in the budget tonight of increased taxes which must inevitably come, will have much in the way of savings to put in that bank.

Finally, to sum up the case I have been making in support of the amendment let me say that what the government is doing and the way it is doing it is a reversal in government policy that indicates schizophrenia in the cabinet and is bound to cause confusion in the country. It is like facing both ways at once. It might even be described as paranoia because there are delusions of grandeur associated with it. We were told that the government was going to usher in a just society. On the one hand it subsidizes, to the astronomical tune of some \$150 million, the electronic media of communication. I will not spend much time on that point because the C.B.C. was inaugurated by a Conservative government in the 1930's to bring about improved means of communication in this nation. Yet there comes a time when we must pause to consider whether the electronic mass media and the printed word are in balance in bringing about improved efficiency in communication.

The government obviously has decided that the mass media should receive the support of government subsidies at the expense of the printed word. In this there are overtones of authoritarianism since, compared with the effectiveness of the printed word, there is an emotional content in the mass media message. Authoritarian régimes, those that move forward in public policy with a minimum of contract with the public or responsibility to it, do so by an emphasized use of radio and television as propaganda media. As I say, there are serious overtones here that ought to be considered in a committee discussion.