

Post Office Act

continued. It is sheer and utter nonsense to introduce a sharp increase in postal rates while at the same time curtailing service in certain areas.

These are some of the answers we should have before we pass this legislation. How is it going to affect the postal workers? What effect will it have on the over-all employment picture? What effect will it have on the earnings of postal employees? These are all problems which face members of this house and we should know the answers to these questions before we are asked to vote intelligently on this measure.

I should like to bring this fact to the attention of the minister. There is a need for an extension of postal services in an area of my riding. I refer to the Castlegar-Kinnaird area. These communities have grown rapidly. Most of the mail is received by the Castlegar post office and distributed from there. This is a fairly densely settled area. There should be greater postal service in this district. I ask the minister to consider this situation and provide the greater service which I think we should have in this modern day and age.

● (4:20 p.m.)

There are one or two more points I wish to make before resuming my seat. We have talked about the rates of increase in the various postal categories. As I said before, some increase is certainly warranted; it has to come. But, again, the rural people are hit the hardest. For example, we have had an overall increase of roughly 25 per cent in respect of money orders. The minister indicated this some time ago. People in rural areas do a great deal of buying through catalogues and the local post office and they have to foot a big chunk of this increase. They have to pay the additional charge simply because they live in rural areas and do their shopping through the mail.

One can go right down the list of postal increases and find that the people hardest hit are those who live in rural areas. These are the pioneers of this country who have moved into the wildernesses, hacked down the trees and built communities. These are the people who have helped build this great nation in which we live. This is why I ask the Postmaster General and members of the house not to be in such a terrific hurry to pass this legislation. Right now there is more urgent legislation on the order paper which could and should be debated in the house.

I appeal to hon. members, when this amendment comes to a vote, to vote to refer the question to a committee where every

[Mr. Harding.]

aspect of the problem and the side effects thereof can be taken into consideration before the legislation is passed. I do so because this measure may cause far more headaches than it will cure.

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to urge the minister to consider sending this bill to a committee for study. I have been interested in following the career of the Postmaster General (Mr. Kierans) and have had the opportunity of meeting and getting to know members of his family who have some very far advanced ideas. I was impressed with the approach of the Postmaster General to the operation of the post office, but I would think that if he were sincerely interested in really doing something for it he would refer this legislation to a parliamentary committee so that he might gain enlightenment on whether the post office should be a department of government or a crown agency. I think there is a great deal of merit in considering this proposition because one would be able to say: We will subsidize certain aspects of the problem but the over-all operation must pay for itself. This, of course, has not always been true of crown corporations, but it has been true of those countries which have set the postal department apart from other departments of government and have made it a crown corporation or operated it as a separate agency.

I do not think we in Canada have done too badly with our post office. Over the years we have developed it into a highly satisfactory service. In my part of the country we have in the last five years been plagued with a decrease in mail and postal services. This has resulted from the discontinuance of the operation of mail service cars to many rural areas. Many years ago, when the railway first went into northern Ontario, letters would be sent by train from one point to another and post office employees sorted the mail on the trains. If a letter was going only 20 miles the sorter in the car would see that it was put off at the next post office.

It is now possible, with our modern technology and advancement, for a letter addressed to someone in the next town 20 miles away, to be put on a train in northern Ontario, carried to Toronto, sorted there, re-shipped to Kirkland Lake or Timmins and re-shipped from there in another mail bag. In some cases it will take 30 days for a letter to reach a person 20 miles away. Therefore I question whether we have really improved this service very rapidly when we have not