

Postal Service

received. Part of the problem is that he has not undertaken enough study to know what the Canadian Post Office does. No less a person than Peter Harrison, commenting on a CBC radio program on December 17 last, gave the other side of the picture. Apparently he did considerably more research than the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) when preparing his motion. I think his radio comments bear repeating.

Mr. Dinsdale: We cannot get any information from the government in order to know.

Mr. Cullen: There is no shortage of information available. Apparently Mr. Harrison was able to get full information, and he is not even a member of this House. In his radio talk he said:

It seems to me that the Canadian postal service is always being maligned by people who haven't got the slightest idea of how mail is handled or how it's paid for. The closest they've been to a mail handling operation is when they bought a stamp, and supposedly that gives them the right to spout absolute nonsense at the drop of letter.

Let's have a look at the Canadian postal service for a minute. From the latest figures for 1970, the government spent approximately \$532,000,000 on postal service. Revenues were only \$432,000,000. Therefore there was a deficit of about \$100,000,000.

When the hon. member was quoting statistics he did not bother to point out how much the postal workers were making from 1962 to 1967. Their low wages gave the Post Office Department a better profit picture than it has now. Mr. Speaker, I think we should be paying these people what they deserve, without trying to make a profit at their expense. Mr. Harrison pointed out:

Labour costs were \$311,000,000 and the post office handled five billion—I repeat five billion—pieces of mail. There are about 10,000 post offices in the country and about 44,000 postal employees, 16,000 of those are letter carriers. An interesting point to note is that out of 10,000 post offices 65 of them account for approximately 80 per cent of total revenues. The rest only contribute 20 per cent, but are kept open because the Post Office Department is a service-oriented organization and everyone has the right to a mail service.

If we listen to the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, I believe he is suggesting that we should close down all these other post offices, forget about service and concentrate on making a profit so that the Post Office Department can end up in the black. I do not think his party would advocate that the people served by these other post offices should be deprived of service, albeit they are not paying in full for it. I continue the quotation:

As for the deficit, that comes out of the taxpayer's pocket in the form of a subsidy.—

The two complaints most often heard are the high postage rates and the speed of service. Canada has the cheapest postal service in the world on an hourly earning basis. That is, we handle more mail cheaper than any other country and do it at a lower postage rate. That's why we have a deficit. People who complain about high postage rates don't know what they're talking about. There were almost no rate adjustments between 1930 and 1968, and no organization can afford to pay today's prices for services at yesterday's revenues. We don't expect private industries to do it, so why expect the Post Office to do it?

Raising the postage rates puts the burden of supporting a postal service directly on the individuals or businesses that use it, and if the rates are not increased the deficit will increase and this puts the burden on all taxpayers whether or not they use the service. It's about \$12 per family in Canada now and, frankly, how many people do you know who use an extra \$12 worth of stamps in a

[Mr. Cullen.]

year? At an extra penny apiece that's 1,200 stamps. The average individual in Canada only buys 28 to 30 cents worth per year. So it boils down to "How do you like your poison?—a penny or two on each stamp or extra dollars on your tax bill!" Think about that one before jumping on the postal department again.

As far as speed of service is concerned, it's getting better all the time. The Post Office Department has been breaking its back to organize what is essentially a labour-intensive, out-moded method of mail handling into a streamlined service. The program is designed to reduce the number of times that a piece of mail has to be handled and to mechanize operations wherever possible. A one-day assured mail service has been inaugurated between major Canadian cities and its success rate in meeting the one-day time limit is between 90 to 98 per cent. That's better than any other government department that I can think of—

I do not know whether I can use the word that he uses here, Mr. Speaker, but he says that it is a "blank" sight better than a lot of private industries.

A new postal code has been devised so that mail can be machine-sorted much faster but that effort will be stymied unless of course the public takes five minutes to memorize their code. All of this has happened in the past year and it required a lot of effort on the part of all postal employees. What do they get for it? A kick in the rear instead of a pat on the shoulder for a job well done. If people are really in such a hurry to get their mail, or to send it out, perhaps they should or could send in constructive suggestions to the Post Office Department on what to do when there is an ice storm, all aircraft are grounded and the mail doesn't move. I'm sure the department would be happy to receive them instead of the usual "Ah, Ah! My letter didn't arrive in 24 hours." Let's give the Post Office Department a little time to improve further and if you have to take out your frustrations on something why not try the revenue department on the slowness of income tax returns?

That is a positive view expressed by Peter Harrison, who is hardly known as a friend of the government. It is not the kind of ill-informed criticism of the Post Office that we get from those who do not take the time or effort to make constructive criticism of a department that is doing a fantastic job under difficult circumstances.

• (1750)

Mr. Rod Thomson (Battleford-Kindersley): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Sarnia-Lambton (Mr. Cullen) would make an admirable lawyer for the defence. I will not argue with some of the statistics that he quoted in defence of the Post Office Department. On this side of the House it is our purpose to draw attention to things that sometimes do not work very well, and hopefully I can do this in a constructive fashion to satisfy the hon. member.

I should like to speak for a moment about a newspaper in my constituency, the *Kindersley Clarion*, which serves not only the town of Kindersley but the surrounding small villages and farming area. People use it to advertise social events and business or commercial enterprises of interest to people in the area. It is a weekly paper published on Wednesday night or Thursday morning. In order to be of any use to the people in the district in regard to weekend events, it has to be in the mail by Friday.

As I understand it, communities east and west of Kindersley receive the newspaper at the proper time. When it moves off the route to communities north and west, for example Hanley, then it frequently arrives late—and if it does not arrive by Friday it is not of much use. Since there is only one paper serving an area such as this, obviously the people want to get it. When we consider the distances involved, it could be delivered by pony express