

Post Office

peregrinations of the present administration. We had delivery service six days a week. We had a first-class postal rate of five cents. The service was fast, reliable, and reasonably economical. The Glassco Royal Commission, which investigated in depth government organization just prior to this time, gave the Post Office Department high marks for efficiency. In fact it was one of the few departments of government which escaped unscathed many criticisms made by the Glassco Royal Commission. Now, unhappily and tragically, because Canadian well-being and national unity depend upon a reliable, responsible, efficient, and reasonably cheap postal service, horror stories abound.

The Post Office Department has become the butt of jokes from coast to coast. I am sure hon. members agree that when people start laughing at a department it is in deep distress indeed. Stories are heard with reference to the now rather regular postal increases. The public is not paying for a service, it is paying for storage, and with each increase in rates the service deteriorates further. Hand in hand with the remarkable perversity of the increasing postal rates, there has been a steady cutback in service. Some of the cutbacks have been ridiculous, beyond understanding and comprehension to common sense.

Almost every day we hear complaints made by members from all sides of the House that the Post Office is cutting back in its door to door delivery service. The only explanation given is that the Post Office Department cannot afford to deliver mail from door to door. On the other hand, in the United Kingdom the post office is increasing its door to door delivery service. The postal service in the United Kingdom is compelled by law and regulations, not only to deliver even in the rural areas to a post box perhaps at the end of the road, but it must put mail right in the slot of the householder's door. Canada is reducing that kind of service.

One of the most ridiculous cutbacks came to my attention recently. The Post Office Department made a decision, if you can believe it, Mr. Speaker, to remove telephones from rural post offices. This was a cutback to save money. This takes us back to the pre-Thomas Edison and the pre-Alexander Graham Bell era of communications. Of course the Post Office is in the communications business. How they can justify a cutback in this kind of service to save money is beyond understanding, as I say. This is especially so in rural areas because the rural areas, more than any other part of the Canadian body politic, require reliable and speedy communications, particularly if we are to arrest the decline in our rural communities. This decline has been going on for the past two decades with increasing speed. The rural population is moving to the city and the rural communities are folding up because of the decline in services of this kind.

The decline of the family farm is involved in this situation, and yet the Post Office Department which is operated by the Government of Canada aggravates the situation by removing telephones from the rural post offices. I say that if they want to make savings in this way, service should be discontinued

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

completely. If that were done there would be an absolute saving in expenditure on the part of the government.

Many people have come to the conclusion, including post masters general who move in and out of the department so fast that they can hardly catch their breath, that, if drastic action is not taken soon, the Post Office could collapse in its own incompetence. This is why I am pleased to have the opportunity to bring these matters to the attention of the House again this afternoon.

The government is not coming to grips with this urgent problem. The only action the Post Office Department has taken, in the last ten years, and I think this is fair criticism, has been to change post masters general so frequently that it has become a game of musical chairs. Nobody knows who is responsible for what from the standpoint of the government. Rates are raised constantly. Ministers opposite used to change rates legally, but now they are doing it illegally. This is the point I want to stress this afternoon.

The Post Office used to operate legally. This goes back to the days to which I referred of ten years ago, when the Post Office at that time was one of the most efficient departments with the most efficient services of any in the world. In the past decade the government has decided, and this is a part of a general move toward secrecy and refusal to take parliament into the confidence of the government, to increase rates, and rather than do so under Section 10 of the Post Office Act, which clearly outlines that it is the obligation under that act, it has decided to do it by the illegal procedure of order in council under the Financial Administration Act.

Another aspect which needs to be mentioned is that the increases in the rates have not been subject to the restrictions of the Anti-Inflation Board. The postal rate has soared from five cents in 1968 to 14 cents in 1978. That is one decade of Liberal administration. Notwithstanding constant increases in the postal rate, the deficit has increased from \$60 million in 1968 to almost \$600 million in 1978. Where are we heading? Why the government does not take action in the face of these dramatic figures is impossible for an ordinary person to understand.

● (1712)

Not only has the cost of service gone up from five cents to 14 cents, but hidden in the deficit is an increase of \$1 in taxation for every \$1 of expenditure for service. Therefore, the actual cost of a first class postage stamp today is 28 cents.

The government does everything in its power to frustrate parliament's opportunity to come to grips with this situation. There is a secrecy in the government that is almost paranoid. Today the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) is almost afraid to call an election, indicating paranoia in that direction. He is afraid to face the electorate.

The motto of the government has become power, patronage, and perpetuity. That is the only explanation I can arrive at. My friend across the way is smiling. He will be smiling on the other side of his face when an election is called. The people are fed up with that sort of nonsense, paranoid secrecy, and refusal