

*Post Office Act*

vast improvement. I ask him how he can talk about a vast improvement. How can he make a judgment such as that. Certainly, I would judge improvements by the service given. The service is absolutely lousy. "Lousy" is not a strong enough word. I judge improvements not by increased rates, not by the promotion of certain gimmicks, but by the service given the public.

*[Translation]*

Mr. Speaker, the minister said he would try to bring about further improvements in the service. That is just what we have been trying to achieve for the past three years. With all deference to the minister, I would ask him not to allow himself to be led by his officials, by the same people who have been in charge of reorganization for two years.

*[English]*

That is completely unacceptable to the Canadian public because service is what the people want. The minister asks whether the post office could pay for itself. Sure, it could pay for itself. I am not against a move along the line of trying to make the post office pay for itself. We can continue to raise the rates and decrease the service, but after a while there must be a balance point. Surely, there is a limit to how much the Canadian public can take and how much we have to pay for the movement of a letter from one place to another. One reason for the decrease in service in rural areas is that the service in these areas does not pay for itself. I suggest to you that we pay taxes in this country to make sure that those parts of the service which pay for themselves will help to cover the deficits in those rural places where the service does not pay for itself. We pay taxes in this country to make sure that these places have a postal service. We contribute through our taxes to the operations of the Post Office Department because we want letters to move on a 24 hour basis, we want letters to move from one city to the next, to move within the cities, and from one rural village to the next.

• (4:50 p.m.)

The public would not mind increases in the rates if improved service came with them, but with the type of inefficiency we have it is totally unacceptable for the government to come to us asking for an increase in rates. The Canadian public does not have to put up with this. In view of all this, and in view of the reasons given to us by the minister, I suggest that the bill should not be read a second time now, and that the minister should explain some of the matters I have raised with respect to the service. The minister should make an honest assessment and tell us what he plans to do to improve the service. Only then will we be able to give the government and the minister the right to increase rates. I suggest that the bill should not now be read a second time, in fact that it should not be read at all. Therefore, I move:

That all the words after "that" be deleted and the following substituted therefor:

"This bill be not now read a second time but be read a second time this day six months from now".

[Mr. Comeau.]

**Mr. Speaker:** I assume the hon. member will allow the Chair to have a copy of the amendment, or perhaps the original. I might suggest to the hon. member that, although there is no difficulty about the procedural aspect of the amendment, it might not be a bad idea to give consideration from time to time to following the accepted form in this kind of amendment, normally referred to as a six months hoist. The wording usually adopted is that the bill be not now read a second time but this day six months hence. This is a detail and I do not want to make an issue of it in any way, but there are accepted forms and perhaps it might be better if we were to respect these forms. The motion has been put.

**Mr. Rod Thomson (Battleford-Kindersley):** Mr. Speaker, in this discussion I think it might be useful if we took a brief over-all view of the Post Office in order to gain a better understanding and perspective of what is involved in its detailed operations. The Post Office is probably the federal service which touches more people more frequently than any other. It is a vast service. It handles close to five billion pieces of mail per year. It serves five million doors. It operates 9,000 post offices, and it employs close to 50,000 people. I think it is fair to say that, despite its problems and recent troubles and disruptions as well as the curtailment of service, the Post Office provides a very good service. We should remember that our Post Office provides part of a global postal service, a part of 132 such services in as many countries. It is a splendid example of what can be attained by co-operative action for the common good.

In my view the Post Office should not be regarded, as it so often has been by both of the older parties, as a place of some importance to which sometimes transient ministers going from post to post are appointed. We have had—and I believe this figure is accurate—11 postmaster generals in the last 14 years. In my view, the Post Office and the public it serves deserve something a good deal better than that. We would not tolerate 10 or 11 head men for, say, Air Canada in 14 years. We should not tolerate it in the case of the postal service. I cast no reflection on the present minister responsible for the Post Office but I suggest to him, to the House and to the country at large that if anyone is going to do a good job any place, any time, anywhere, he must have a longer period of time to study the problems and to get acquainted with his job than postmaster generals have had until now. I do not know whether it is the intention of the government to shift this minister to another post but I do not think it is fair to him or to the country, nor do I think it would be fair to the new minister who would replace him. In this respect we should demand of governments better and more consistent management, and whatever the future holds for the present minister I hope it will not be a shift of this nature.

In my opinion, whether efficiency is achieved by making the Post Office a Crown corporation rather than a department of government in some other manner, we need to look upon the Post Office a good deal more seriously than has been the case so far. We need to improve its long range planning, its costing procedures