

*Post Office Act*

experts tell us that this is an essential and inevitable trend, and we have been moving gradually toward this desired objective. I would have thought that this government, which during the recent election campaign prattled incessantly about the necessity for greater participation and involvement in the affairs of the nation, would have been the first to support this theme. But what did we hear yesterday? We heard the government house leader resort to some of the most outmoded precedents in defending the government's stubborn refusal to take the logical step in dealing with this legislation, namely, referral to a committee.

One of the first breakthroughs in broader and more effective use of the committee system was ten years ago when the members of the veterans affairs committee, in a long series of discussions and deliberations, undertook a comprehensive review of the veterans charter, as a result of which many necessary amendments were made. More recently we have followed the same practice in transportation matters during the reorganization of this fundamental communications system. I am sure that any of those still members of the house who had the privilege of taking part in that interesting dialogue will agree that the resulting transportation act has been a much more effective document than it would have been had it not been referred to a committee before receiving second reading in the house.

I could mention other similar developments that have taken place. Suffice it to say that I am sure it is a disappointment to members on both sides of the house and particularly to the people of Canada, following the pious pronouncements of the members of the Liberal party during the recent election campaign about greater involvement of parliament and the people in participatory democracy, that the spokesman for the government yesterday took a completely reactionary approach.

The Postmaster General indicated when he spoke yesterday that he regards the postal service as an industry. I think I am quoting him correctly when I say that he used words to the effect that the Post Office Department is not an institution but a function. That, too Mr. Speaker, sounds like a voice from the board room and not vox populi. Anyone who understands the principles of responsible parliamentary democracy will acknowledge that communications are basic to nationhood, that they are part and parcel of national policy. I am sure we will all agree that in a diverse country such as Canada national policy is of the utmost importance, particularly in the

communications field. We have long recognized in many communications areas that any function of this kind, to use the Postmaster General's term, must be a part of national policy.

I suppose, that in democratic nations post office services were the first to come under a public utility operation because of the importance of communications in holding nations together. We subsidize the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's electronic communication to a substantial extent. We subsidize our railroad system. In some years we have subsidized Air Canada. We subsidize the operations of the Canada Council. In fact, the grant to the Canada Council is being increased this year over last year. We do all this in the interest of broader communication and understanding, in the interest of development toward nationhood in Canada.

The minister has missed the point as a result of his own personal background. The Postmaster General comes from an environment of many newspapers, with several radio and television stations within easy reach, a teletype service and a private messenger and delivery service. Therefore I believe that his viewpoint has been distorted and he has completely lost contact with the special needs of the rural community.

While the minister has made the gesture of restoring six day service to rural areas, I think this will only confuse the issue. In some constituencies like my own which are half urban, half rural it means that the Post Office Department will still have to function six days a week in order to serve the surrounding rural area, whereas the urban community apparently will be without the six day service. I do not know how this will be arranged in terms of administrative efficiency. Some of the post office workers will have to be on the job to serve the surrounding rural neighbourhood. Notwithstanding this, in the city of Brandon I presume the people will be deprived of six day service.

Another aspect of the government's approach to the matter which amazes me and confuses the public of Canada is that this action flies in the face of another of the Liberal party campaign slogans—the necessity for redressing the balance of regional disparity in Canada. We must remember that Canada is a nation from sea to sea and that all parts must be treated equally in terms of services and facilities. Here we have a complete inconsistency in government policy. I might just go through one or two of these items, Mr. Speaker, to point out what should