

Canada Post Corporation Act

the Post Office and they will not have the funds to pay for its services.

I would like to mention briefly the Liberal record with respect to the Post Office. To say that it is sad is an understatement. There have been 14 strikes in the Post Office since 1918. All but three of these have taken place under the Liberal government of the present Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau). Hopefully, by converting the Post Office into a Crown corporation we will alleviate some of these problems. Certainly, some of these problems relate to the fact that the Post Office labours under three federal departments, the Public Service Commission, the Treasury Board and the Department of Public Works. There is no question in the mind of most people who understand the Post Office that this creates a serious problem. The situation is certainly not made easier by the difficulties which exist between managements and union within the Post Office system.

During the presentation of the budget the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) left out the figures covering the losses for the Post Office this year. It is estimated that the Post Office will lose between \$400 million and \$500 million. Somewhere along the line we would like to know how this will be paid for. I believe I am correct when I say that during the committee meetings it was mentioned that the price of mailing a letter will have to rise to as high as 34 cents. We received little response from the Postmaster General with respect to this subject. He seems to think that the costs will all be covered. Will the Post Office be forgiven its debts? Is this how this Crown corporation will be created? The Postmaster General is silent with respect to these questions, and was for most of the discussions in committee. The costs to run the Post Office have been climbing at an astronomical rate.

In the motion before us we are not suggesting that any of the services or revenues of the Post Office be replaced at the present time. I support the motion which is before us tonight. I hope all members of the House will support it. When the bill is voted upon I think all of us will give it due consideration, but we will not consider it in isolation. We need to consider the bill in conjunction with the excellent motions which will be coming before the House in the next couple of weeks.

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening very closely to the comments which hon. members have made so far on motion No. 1 aimed at amending the act to establish the Canada Post Corporation by adding the definition of a letter in clause 2. I think it is important to remind hon. members at this time that the question of whether the act ought to include a definition of the word "letter" was debated at length and very seriously when the bill was before the committee.

I must say that the type of intervention just made by the previous speaker does make me a little bit sad because, in fact, he jumped on that opportunity to dwell on several topics which

are altogether alien to motion No. 1. I respectfully suggest to him that a general debate on the Post Office has been held on many occasions and that, as recently as this morning, I appeared before a standing committee of the House of Commons where I answered a number of questions having to do with both over-all and specific postal operations in many ridings. Had the hon. member been able to be in attendance this morning, I would have been glad to answer his questions and deal directly with his concerns in his riding. In any event, this amendment introduced by my colleague opposite prompts me to make the following comments.

[English]

The suggestion that "letter" be defined in the bill came from several interests groups which were concerned that by allowing the corporation to define "letter", the Post Office could, in effect, by regulation, define its own monopoly. If such were to occur, these groups argue that such things as telex messages and intra-company letters could be trapped by the monopoly. This is why the solution advanced by many of these concerned parties was to have the term "letter" defined in the bill. I responded in committee by tabling a draft definition which, while being acceptable to many, was not perfect and was not wholly satisfactory for a number of reasons. First, time did not permit the adequate refinement of the definition. Even so, the difficulties in having an appropriate definition of the term "letter" are almost insurmountable. I challenge any member of the committee to come forward with an appropriate definition.

• (2040)

The hon. member who introduced this motion copied the definition I tabled in the committee, indicating it was not a perfect definition.

Mr. Blenkarn: Your definition.

Mr. Ouellet: I have to say that although the hon. member has more or less copied my definition, it is not better today than it was when I first tabled it.

The second reason it was not satisfactory was because, if the definition were in the act, it would be virtually immutable and could not be adjusted to take into account actual operating experience, changes in technology or changes in the marketplace. My draft definition was still under consideration when the committee proceeded to address the immediate legitimate concerns of parties who made representations to our committee by including additional exemptions to the exclusive privilege under clause 15(1) of our legislation. It was decided that as a further measure to protect the public from the corporation expanding its monopoly through regulation it would be a requirement that all regulations be pre-Gazetted. Such a requirement would serve to guarantee that notice be given of any regulation amendment and that there would be mechanisms for the public to express its views to any draft regulations.

I have to point out to hon. members of this House that it was unanimously accepted by the committee that a definition