

Postal Rates

Mr. Miller: I have no intention of crossing the floor. Probably we will be over there soon as legitimate New Democrats in a new government.

I congratulate the Postmaster General on his appointment. I assure him that my party is prepared to co-operate in any way possible to improve a very crucial Canadian public service. The comments I have had from colleagues dealing with the Post Office and the Postmaster General indicate that there has been good access to information and that the Postmaster General is attempting to meet the needs of our community. I hope he will continue to do that. We will support him in his actions.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, I should like to begin by echoing the remarks of my colleagues regarding the principle of the bill, the principle of parliamentary approval of increases in postal rates. Because I want to keep my remarks brief, I will not say anything more about that.

In my view, a bill respecting an increase in postal rates provides us with an opportunity to talk about the level of service which ought to accompany those increases. Also it provides us with an opportunity to suggest, at the very least, that services ought to be maintained, if not increased.

I have two concerns with regard to service that I wish to bring up at this time. As we move to approve rates already in place, we should reflect on the level of postal service available to Canadians at this time. These concerns may not seem to be of national importance, but I submit that in city after city, place after place, town after town, and business after business, an accumulation of inadequacies in postal service constitutes one of those problems that, although it does not receive national attention, relates very concretely and practically to the lives of many Canadians. It ought to receive attention in this House in the same manner that any other issue receives attention.

Specifically I am concerned about the latest efficiency program of the Post Office, an efficiency program which has led to the removal of many letter boxes in Winnipeg and in other major Canadian cities. Much attention has been paid to this issue in the local Winnipeg media, and rightly so, as many people, particularly senior citizens, have been affected and will be increasingly affected as winter comes on by the imposition of a greater distance between them and the location at which they mail their letters.

On this issue I must say that I have had negotiations with the Postmaster General. He indicated that some of the removed letter boxes in the riding of Winnipeg-Birds Hill will be replaced. I have submitted a list of the missing boxes brought to my attention by constituents to help him decide which ones should be put back, as I understand that the efficiency program is not to be abandoned entirely. I trust this will happen, that the letter boxes I submitted for reinstallation will go back up some time next week. So far the only ones reinstalled, with a few exceptions—and I mean a few—have

not been in Winnipeg-Birds Hill or any other area in Winnipeg but those areas which are popularly recognized as ones in which the social and economic elite of Winnipeg live. This would be a situation, should it continue, that I hope the minister would find outrageous. At least, I know my constituents would find the situation outrageous. Therefore, I am confident that the letter boxes will be put back in place.

In my view, efficiency and rationalization must not obscure the fact that postal services exist for the people, not the other way around. The use of the postal service must not be discouraged by bad service. One almost sees a parallel here between what happened with regard to postal service and what is happening to services provided by Via Rail, for instance. The more people that use a service, particularly an energy efficient service, the better it will be for all of us in the long run. The gas saved by mail trucks not having to go to as many boxes as they used to will not compare with the energy and human effort which will have to be expended getting letters delivered for people who cannot do it themselves, people who otherwise would have mailed them independently.

This brings me to my second concern, and that is home delivery service to new areas. Winnipeg-Birds Hill has many new housing subdivisions which do not yet have home delivery postal service. Some of those areas have been around for a long time, yet they do not have home delivery. Bringing home delivery to these areas will not only bring to the people concerned the service they had the right to expect when they bought their homes in those new areas, but also it will create employment. I will have more to say on this at a later time, as I do not have the details at this time to put before the House. I will be watching to see what happens in this area. I recommend government action in respect to this concern.

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, I will not be long either because I know the minister is anxious to close this debate. I should like to congratulate the Postmaster General (Mr. Fraser) on bringing this bill dealing with a retroactive increase in postal rates before the House. Also I congratulate him for the indication that future increases will be legislated in this House, rather than by orders in council as in the past.

I am sure the minister is upset about the idea that we are now paying 17 cents to mail a letter, yet we are receiving poorer postal service than ever before. I suppose we are in the age of computers and high technology.

Mr. Rodriguez: The age of Aquarius.

Mr. Peters: I think we have passed the age of Aquarius. Much has been said, but I think we should look at what has been done in the Post Office. People in the Post Office have told us for a long time that it was necessary to accelerate the sorting, collection and delivery of mail. I should like to ask hon. members individually if in their own experience there is less first class mail today than ever before. Most people do not use mail services any more. They use the telephone. We have probably become the most wasteful telephone service any-