

To a small hamlet the loss of its post office meant it ceased to exist. There was no longer a postal mark for it. Invariably, it was not an organized community and nothing was left of that hamlet which to previous generations had been an important community, a place which they called home. I recall that at the time of the post office closings many delegations from my constituency met the then postmaster general, Mr. Kierans, to seek improvement in rural route deliveries. We were able to get a six-day delivery for the rural routes instead of three or four-day delivery. This is one example where the number of deliveries on some of these routes was improved, whereas in the cities the number of days for delivery was reduced.

As I say, I think we can all sympathize with that part of the hon. member's motion. He seems to be suggesting that we should go back to the good old days, but anybody who looks at matters realistically cannot think of going back to the good old days in face of the volume of mail which is passing through the postal system. In 1840, 133 years ago, mail arriving from England was transported once each month from Halifax to Quebec City. When the mail arrived at the Quebec City post office even the accountants had to become mail sorters. In that era large volumes of mail were the exception rather than the rule. Very simple mail handling methods could be used for such temporary needs.

However, in 1973 and in the years for which we must plan now, enormous volumes of mail arrive every day. There has been a change in the workload, and the Post Office Department is changing too. One part of the attempt to draw the best possible good out of the inevitable change was the postal code which was introduced during the last couple of years. Urbanization and the population increase have resulted in further complications. For example, our 15 largest Canadian cities account for 85 per cent of all the mail. Montreal and Toronto alone account for 44 per cent. Every day Canadians mail about 15 million letters and parcels. In one year this adds up to 5 billion pieces. When this mail is sorted by hand, a letter can be handled up to 21 times between mailing and delivery. It is obvious that the Post Office must change its ways in an attempt to accommodate all this.

Mr. Stanfield: Like the government.

Mr. Foster: Just calm down, I say to the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield).

We have all seen great changes in Canada in the past few decades. Technological advances, especially in the field of communications, are radically altering our way of life at an ever increasing rate; and this trend will continue. No organization, and the Post Office is no different from any other, can afford to ignore the technological, demographic and sociological changes that have occurred. The Post Office has to keep up with technological change or it will become an expensive, archaic anachronism, out of step with the times and irrelevant to the needs of Canadians. While some may think that the updating of postal operations is proceeding too quickly, large numbers of the public have the impression that it is changing too slowly.

Post Office

In response to this challenge, and in order to provide Canadians with a postal service that will meet current demands, the Post Office Department is introducing a national program of coding and mechanization. This afternoon the Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) has indicated that this reorganization will result in an efficient and cost-effective system for sorting the mail, particularly in our larger centres.

A recent survey indicated that Canada's population will reach 26 million by 1985. The existing trend toward urbanization will continue, to the extent that 22 million of those 26 million people will be living in our cities and larger towns in just over 12 years from now. Canada is not the only nation adopting new methods for handling mail. The United States, Great Britain, Japan—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but the time allotted to him has expired.

Mr. Bill Knight (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, having listened to this debate I can say that if mothers in the city of Ottawa were having difficulty putting their babies to sleep between eleven o'clock this morning and one o'clock this afternoon, they ought to have brought them to the House of Commons. I was also struck by the fact that we Canadians always have one good whipping boy, and that happens to be the Post Office. Of course, the difficulty is that at times there is considerable justification for whipping the Canadian Post Office.

Mr. Horner (Battleford-Kindersley): Let's sell it.

Mr. Knight: One honourable reactionary from the province of Saskatchewan probably wants to sell it back to private enterprise. To the hon. member for Battleford-Kindersley (Mr. Horner), private enterprise is God. I have never heard anything so ridiculous. We set up the Post Office as a public service and took over that service from private enterprise; now he wants to go back three or four centuries.

● (1530)

In his speech, the Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) showed enthusiasm for his job and for the continued improvement of postal service in Canada. For that I commend him. Like the hon. member for Scarborough East (Mr. Stackhouse), I hope the minister will persist in his attempts to solve the problems that exist, including those affecting my constituency of Assiniboia. What surprised me was the mention of 95 per cent efficiency. I should like that explained. Efficiency, I think, should be discussed under two headings. First, how efficient are the new machines that are being used in post offices such as the one in Ottawa? I know that technical and mechanical difficulties have arisen in the sorting of mail in the Ottawa post office. I have listened to postal workers, and according to what they tell me—this they have learned from other postal workers across the country—only certain types of letters will go through the machine: letters of the wrong size will throw off the whole machine. This is the result of our investment of millions of dollars!

Second, how efficient are the new postal codes that we are using? Judging from the mail that comes to my office,