

Post Office

Quebec as well as the northeastern part of Ontario. I am quite aware of that.

Now, as for the problem of postal stations, I cannot make a general statement dealing with each one of the postal stations within the member's riding, or generally speaking within the Abitibi region, but I am prepared to listen to the representations he would like to make to me in order to see what kind of flexibility could be reached within the framework of our existing contracts and regulations in order to provide for the needs of the postal contractors of that region. I can assure the member that profit is indeed not our prime motivation in the Canadian north but rather the concern to provide a public service. All Canadians must be aware that we are trying to carry out our responsibilities as best we can and that in providing services in those regions, we cannot expect a sizeable revenue given the volume of mail and the distances to be covered.

[*English*]

Mr. Dinsdale: Mr. Speaker, I have already asked my question. I had hoped the Postmaster General would have responded. It was asked in the form of a suggestion that the minister should refer the whole question of increases in postal rates by order in council to the Supreme Court, in light of the strong, unanimous condemnation in the report of the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments that was issued earlier this year. I know that he has misgivings with regard to the legality of what he is doing. I know he contemplates amendments to the Post Office Act so that any possible suggestion of illegality will be removed.

I suggest that referring this question to the Supreme Court is one way of getting a decision, or he should bring in the necessary amendments to the act. That would make it possible to assure the public of Canada and this House that increasing rates in this way is within the law. Perhaps even more important, why does he not proceed to the fundamental changes that are becoming increasingly obvious with regard to Post Office operations? Other countries faced with the vexing problem of inflation have been able to get around it without too much protest by setting up commissions on postal rates and commissions on postal rates set comprising representatives of labour, management and postal users. They sit around the table and decide, in light of all the factors, whether an increase is necessary. The postal users conference has not really become an official organization, but the Postmaster General meets with it at least once a year—

● (1632)

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not want to permit the hon. member to make a further response to the statement. I understood he was asking the minister a question.

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, I am constantly amazed at the selective analysis the hon. gentleman derives from his own experience. He would, surely, be the first to admit that the commission concept with respect to the establishment of postal rates is a lousy concept and that it is not working. The

[*Mr. Blais.*]

commission is having more difficulty in making up its mind to increase postal rates than the hon. member had when he was postmaster general.

Mr. Dinsdale: I was never postmaster general.

Mr. Blais: I thought you had been. When the opposition was governing the country, it did not dare to increase postal rates. It was not taking its responsibilities sufficiently seriously. I might point out that there is a monstrous deficit today in the United States, where the government has created a public corporation and established a commission. They are finding great difficulty in getting a decision from their commission with respect to increases in postal rates. The post office there is facing huge, ongoing deficits, yet they cannot get the commissioners to move. As a result, there is increasing pressure from the elected representatives who say: Restore the old control system, because we have to pay for the post office yet we have no control over it.

In terms of the legality of my proposal, here again the hon. gentleman is making a very selective analysis. The statutory instruments committee never said the use of section 13 was illegal. I am satisfied that the use of section 13 of the Financial Administration Act is legal. I am acting under that legislation. If the hon. gentleman is serious in suggesting that the statutory instruments committee has indicated there was illegality, may I say this to him: I recall that the report was tabled in the House and that it was not subject to further debate. It died on the order paper. If there was an issue which ought to have been raised at that time, why was that not done by the hon. gentleman, who seems to have a great deal of interest in what I am doing today?

Mr. Dinsdale: The Postmaster General paid me the compliment of suggesting that I am an avid reader of his speeches. There was one of his speeches a copy of which he did not send me, but I have seen it reported in the press. It was a speech made in his constituency, and obviously he was discussing some of the ongoing problems in the Post Office with some of his constituents who were rather unhappy about the situation. They asked him when he was going to introduce into the management of the department the fundamental changes which are necessary. The minister replied that they would be forthcoming, but not until after the election. Why not proceed before the election?

Mr. Blais: That must have been a meeting in camera.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Clermont: Mr. Speaker, the Postmaster General mentioned in his statement as the main reason for the increase in postal rates the deficit his department has been facing for many years and particularly from 71-72 to 76-77.

Could the minister also announce other revenue opportunities and particularly some developments as regards parcel delivery to compete with the private sector? We know very well that seven or eight years ago parcel delivery by the private