

*Post Office Act*

bers have even commended the department for the efficiency of its service. I want to thank all those who participated in this debate.

Mr. Speaker, we must be realistic and we cannot expect wild cheers for a legislation aiming at increasing the postal rates on any class of mail. Hon. members cannot be blamed for taking this opportunity to criticize the minister in charge.

In my remarks on the motion for second reading, I will not be able to reply to all the questions and to all the remarks. The committee which will study this bill will be in a better position to do it and if I cannot reply at the committee stage, I will personally get in touch with members who have raised specific problems.

In his remarks, the hon. member for Wellington (Mr. Hales) said, and I quote: "I had a public relations job to do." I can assure him that I will appoint nobody from the opposition to do this job.

If all the department's clients were to read what the members have said during this debate, it would be enough to discourage them. However, most of our clients have a better opinion of the Post Office than some hon. members.

It is true that our postal system is not perfect and that we have much to do to improve the department's reputation. We can accept these critics but we can keep our heads high since, in spite of all the difficulties the department has been meeting and is still meeting, we have maintained a kind of service which compares favourably with any postal service in the world. The steps and decisions recently taken will significantly improve this service.

It has been said and repeated in the past—before 1963, if my memory serves me right—that the department was making profits. Perhaps this was true in the books but if the account system had been the same then as it is now, those profits would have turned into deficits. In fact during those years, the department did not have to pay rent and the fringe benefits of the employees were not paid by the Post Office Department but by the Treasury Board.

Today those expenses remain in our accounting books and the bill now before us will also fill in another gap, as it will require other departments to pay all their mailing expenses.

Some people wonder why, and rightly perhaps, after a rather substantial increase in postal rates in 1968, we had a \$120 million deficit in 1970. As I already said, it is because of a tremendous decrease in mail volume, mostly due to transportation disruptions in Montreal, in the spring of 1970, and to rotating strikes in the summer of 1970.

Several members during this debate ask us to cut our expenditures. But how could it be done when practically all the costs incurred are for workers salaries and transportation expenses? People seem to forget very quickly, Mr. Speaker, that changes were long overdue in the department.

Have we already forgotten the Montpetit report on the working conditions in the Post Office Department? We

[Mr. Côté (Longueuil).]

could certainly save some money, but I hope we shall never go back to the system under which employees worked for starveling wages in outmoded buildings.

Mr. Speaker, a visit to certain offices where all improvements are not completed yet would show that no public servant from any other department would work in our buildings. Even though postal workers have the reputation of being militants, I feel they have shown great patience in some cases.

As far as our buildings are concerned, a five-year renewal and building program was undertaken in 1970. Its total cost is more than \$300 million and it will take care of more than 800 post offices across the country.

In the city of Montreal only, the program providing for the construction of new post offices will cost about \$60 million, whereas in the city of Toronto, a similar program will cost about \$75 million. Moreover, as an essential tool for the planned updating of the Post Office, a five-year mechanization program of postal operations was recently approved by the cabinet.

The total cost of this program will amount to about \$80 million. The mechanization of postal operations will ensure a much faster service. In certain cases, it will speed up mail delivery by several hours.

Finally, in order to offer its clients improved services, the department has decided to launch new programs. I have already mentioned the assured mail program. No doubt, it is effective. It is not merely a publicity gimmick, as a member suggested.

We expect from this program a dependable postal service on which the Canadian people can rely. This program, launched last winter in Toronto, has since been implemented in four cities of western Canada: Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver. It will be established very soon in the Ottawa-Hull area, and in the city of Montreal, next July. It will progressively extend to practically all Canadian cities by the end of 1972.

• (5:10 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker, until this system becomes fully operative and because our whole transportation system and our pricing methods must be changed, it may be that in some cases our service will be far from adequate. People are of course impatient.

Another program designed to hasten mail deliveries is known as the "Postal Code". It has been initiated here in Ottawa on April 1. By the beginning of 1974, the Code will be a permanent part of every Canadian postal address. This Code, which is an alpha-numeric combination, has unparalleled accuracy. It contains a great deal of information and it can even designate a single building in the case of a large apartment or office complex containing many units.

The new service, Mr. Speaker, reflects the concern of the Post Office to better serve Canadians. When I announced certain changes such as re-establishment of wicket service on Saturdays, we were applauded for that step. My announcement that the door-to-door delivery had been resumed in some cities, a service that had been frozen in 1968, was again applauded. The announcement