

Post Office Act

minister that if he is going to scrutinize the cost he should look into correspondence with the former postmaster general.

Mr. Kierans: I will, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Orlikow: I should like to direct one question to the minister. He has told us that the reduction from the six day to the five day service will not mean a great reduction in staff because in the period of a year, with the normal attrition and with the large staff the department has—I think the minister spoke of 48,000 employees—this could be handled. I do not have the figures with me, although I am sure we can get them by the time we deal with the minister's estimates, but I am given to understand that in some of the larger post offices, such as in Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver, to mention just a few, there has been consistently and, I can say, regularly a very large number of temporary employees who are not included in the complement of 48,000. Can the minister tell us what is the average number of extra employees in the course of the year, and how many of them who have been working almost continuously will be laid off under the proposed legislation?

Mr. Kierans: We have a great number of continuous casual employees in peak periods, such as around Christmas time. I think we will continue to need them for the special services which they can render us at particular times. There is nothing more that I can say about this.

Mr. Orlikow: Is the minister saying that he cannot tell us how many of them there are? Let us forget about the Christmas period. Are there 3,000, 5,000 or 8,000 who work more or less regularly, and will these people be laid off as a result of the reduction in service?

Mr. Kierans: I have said no. The casual people whom we hire around Christmas time, and at other times, are just part-time or seasonal employees and they do not figure in the numbers which the hon. member for Winnipeg North and I are discussing. As I tried to explain, no one is going to be laid off, because we would normally expand by 1,100 people by next year and we will probably lose about 2,000 next year. So it is easy to move the 1,499 employees into the positions that have become open with the planning which we do in the department.

Mr. Orlikow: The minister does not get the point I am making. Today is October 25: How
[Mr. Korchinski.]

many casual employees are working in the Post Office Department in Canada on this day? Is it 1,000, 2,000 or 5,000?

Mr. Kierans: As the hon. member realizes, not even the senior officers in the department could give him an exact number because it varies from day to day, depending on the work load. But I would think there are about 2,000 people normally involved in the kind of position which we call casual.

Mr. Skoberg: One of the questions which among others I put to the Postmaster General the other day concerned the decentralization of post office facilities. I wonder whether or not the Postmaster General at this time believes in the complete decentralization of all post office facilities for the sorting of mail. Does he consider that decentralization is in the interest of the country as a whole, and what is his view regarding congestion in this area?

Mr. Kierans: This is probably one of the major problems being presently considered by the task forces, one of which is inside the department and is headed by the former deputy minister whose long experience of 40 years gives him a practical knowledge of the problems, and the other being an outside task force. They will consider how far we should go in decentralizing the services.

Clause agreed to.

Clause 2 agreed to.

On clause 3—*Rates on letters.*

● (3:50 p.m.)

Mr. Macquarrie: Of course, Mr. Chairman, this is one of the crunch items in the bill. I doubt if after all the points we have made from this side, without too much avail but with great sincerity, there are many items in this long bill on which we will take a controversial stand. What has irked people about this measure, apart from the differentiation in respect of newspapers, has been this question of increased cost to patrons of the postal service at the very time when there was a decrease in service. This has been the basis of our opposition.

We have never adopted the point of view that there should be no increase in rates. In the light of the dismal figures that have been presented to us, this would be a preposterous attitude to take. We are not satisfied, however, with the combination of the diminution of service and the rather significant increase in rates.