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## Hikes Spark Alternate Mailing Ideas

**R**ETURN of the two-cent stamp brings back memories for many who experienced the Great Depression of the 1930s. The two-centers are in demand to use up 13-cent stamps on hand; not to pay for delivering letters by themselves, as they used to.

Postage rates now have been increased four times since 1970, either as a result of inflation or as a cause of it, or both.

The new 15-cent first class rate is going into effect just ahead of the largest single collective-bargaining negotiations in the country. The Postal Workers Union involves around 600,000 employees of the quasi-governmental National Postal Service.

If union demands follow patterns of the past, they will absorb the increased revenue, the Postal Service will continue to run in the red, and improvements in services will be small.

Two years ago when the 13-cent postage rate on first class mail was still new, patronage declined and the Postal Service launched an ad-

vertising campaign urging patrons to mail more letters. Previously, officials complained that the tremendous volume of mail made the system unwieldy, inefficient and unprofitable.

Probably the advertising campaign helped, because most of us seem to be getting about as many bills as ever, even more direct mail solicitations for donations, many catalogs and packages of leaflets urging us to buy anything and everything by mail.

In many cases, charges added for "postage and handling" make prices in local stores very competitive with mail bargains.

The Postal Workers' negotiations may be helped somewhat by the new higher minimum wage law, because it costs more to employ alternate delivery methods. However, postal officials estimated a year ago that more than 60 percent of parcels were being delivered by private carriers. The rate increase of 36.8 percent on parcels could boost this production.

The Postal Workers' case might

be weakened by expanding use of systems for transmitting "electronic mail." A number of private corporations have developed apparently profitable businesses in this field. Electronic mail costs more but gets there sooner.

Newspaper, magazine, book and record publishers have been examining alternate delivery systems. Business firms are searching for lower cost ways to bill their customers.

If they could coordinate their billing dates, perhaps suppliers could have their own people bring the entire batch of utility bills to each customer in one big handful.

Then, with electronic bill-paying systems already in operation, customers could settle the entire lot with a single telephone call, saving writing a check or using an envelope.

Or maybe we will start asking ourselves "Is this letter really necessary?" before we start writing and avoid repenting of things we never should have said in the first place.