

Government Orders

• (1430)

Mr. Jim Edwards (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Madam Speaker, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate this afternoon.

Bill C-73 concerns Canada Post Corporation and gives the opportunity to employees of the corporation to share participation in the company. As has been noted, the availability of share participation has been deemed by responsible surveys to be a productive mechanism in 90 per cent of the cases. Indeed, 75 per cent of employees who have participated in such plans have favoured them as well.

While there is no way of knowing the extent to which Canada Post employees would take up this particular opportunity, the freedom for them to take it up or to refuse it is always there. I believe that the issue that is before us requires a good deal of debate.

In order to give an opportunity for all members of the House to participate, since we have had some interruptions today, I would move pursuant to Standing Order 26(1):

That the House continue to sit beyond the normal hour of adjournment for the purpose of continuing consideration of Bill C-73, an act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act.

And more than 15 members having risen:

Madam Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 26(2), the motion is deemed to have been withdrawn.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): Madam Speaker, I am going to be splitting my time with my colleague so I have only five minutes, I believe.

I want to be on the record to make just a few points. Number one, I have always been a strong supporter of the postal system in this country. In fact, I remember being part of a study in 1982 when we discovered that the postal corporation, Canada Post, had an efficiency rating of close to 96 per cent.

In terms of efficiency, that is something that is unheard of. This was when we had post offices all over the country. This is something where philosophically I am on the other side of the spectrum from the government. I believe that the post office system of this country was a great instrument of federal presence.

I can remember the period of the referendum. The postal service in Quebec was a tremendous agent in helping to keep this country together. I think of rural Canada and the number of postal offices that were closed there in the last few years. It does not really contribute to galvanizing the will of this country in pulling it together. From a federal presence point of view, Madam Speaker, I say through you to the government that I am totally opposed to all of these post offices that it is closing. A lot of Canadians do not realize that these postal offices provide services beyond mail in rural Canada and even in urban centres. They have been access points for senior citizens in terms of getting their pension plans and other programs organized, and so it is wrong to be chopping up that federal presence across the country.

The other point is that it is not just rural Canada. In my riding there were two post offices which were running most efficiently in downtown Toronto and which were closed in the last six months. I received complaints from small businesses, people who run home-based businesses and use the post office box system as part of their business practice. The fact that we shut down these main post offices and turn them into franchise units where they do not have the facilities to provide the same level of service I think is wrong.

With regard to the relevance of this bill, I have absolutely no problem with the concept of equity participation for employees. This is a good thing. What I am really concerned about in this particular bill is that there is a non-voting share. There does not seem to be a code of shareholders' rights attached to this bill.

How do you value these shares? We all know that the postal service of this country is actually showing profits, not out of its operating system, but it has actually been liquidating assets in terms of land and buildings. I am sure in my riding where it has shut down the post office that the next step will be to basically sell the land or sell the building so it can get some quick cash to beef up the financial statement so it can ultimately turn it into a totally privatized operation.

In business, people have a system of earnings per share per quarter where the bottom line is all that business looks for. In government, we are in the business of servicing people. I think that the direction the government is taking with this act is working against service to the public.