

Government Orders

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House today and address this particular matter.

As many people will know, this bill seeks to make shares of the Canada Post Corporation available to its employees. One of the actions of government that I find difficult to accept is the closure that has been imposed on this particular debate on a fundamental question; namely, whether this particular corporation in a sense is going to be privatized.

I find that alarming and unfortunate because we are talking about the future of several thousands of Canadians in a climate of recession and a climate in which people are really concerned about their futures and their jobs. I want it noted that this government has done this on several occasions. Some people say it always does it whenever it is dealing with a delicate issue and particularly when it thinks it is going to get into difficulty.

One of my colleagues has described this particular move by government as one which seeks to place another nail in the privatization coffin of Canada Post. I want to make it perfectly clear that I am not, in principle, opposed to privatization of certain sectors. I think we have to examine under what conditions this might take place.

For those who are enthralled with this whole notion of privatization, I urge you to go out in front of the House of Commons today and talk to the employees of Air Canada and ask them a number of questions. Ask them what they think of privatization, because they have been privatized. Ask them how many people they have lost since they were privatized. Ask them how many more employees will lose their jobs in the very near future. There are alarming comments that have been made with respect to losses of jobs that are going to affect many, many men and women. They are going to be announced very, very shortly. I hope that is just a rumour and an unfounded one, but I am extremely suspicious.

While you are out there in front of the House of Commons where there are roughly 400 people from Air Canada who are demonstrating, ask them how successful they have been in having a level playing field in the private sector and how difficult it has been to try to get access to the Japanese market.

The reason for my bringing those to the attention of my colleagues is that a lot of people look at privatization as some sort of a panacea, that all of a sudden all of the problems that existed are going to be gone. This is an example of privatization and it is not all rosy. If you were to go to the employees today and ask them what they think about it, you would be extremely surprised and certainly there is real concern out there, a legitimate concern.

I want to point out, as have a number of my colleagues, that this bill is an extremely general one. Why is there no value in shares? Why is there no identification of the number of shares? Why do we not talk about the net worth of the corporation? Why is there no definition of an employee who will be able to buy those shares? Why is the amount of shares individual employees would be able to purchase not announced?

Once again the government has left to regulation by cabinet and Treasury Board the powers to establish the terms of the share offering. Why cabinet? Why Treasury Board?

As I mentioned, the bill does not provide specifics on share offering. The bill does not place value on assets, on the value of shares. The bill even permits shares to be given away. The first reaction that one has is to whom would they be given away? It might be very attractive for some high-placed friends of the government in executive positions in the corporation. I would hope that would never come to be but certainly some people suspect that.

The other element that needs to be noticed is that the shares are non-voting shares. If they are non-voting shares then you cannot take part in the decision making and you cannot be on the board. How useful is that?

The bill does not protect employees. Those employees have not had a contract for three years. It has gone through mediation, it has gone through all kinds of hoops and hurdles and still today—and my colleague raised it the day before yesterday—we do not have an agreement for our postal employees. I find that shocking. I find that most unfortunate.

How would this bill help that kind of situation? I should point out that there has been no effective communication or consultation with the employees with respect to that—none whatsoever.