

trator; both of them came from private industry. They could not get anywhere because they were subject to Treasury Board, Public Works, Supply and Services and any number of other government departments which always interfered in what the Post Office Department was trying to do.

Finally, I would ask the Postmaster General to go back to his mentor. I do not know whether he is on friendly terms with the Hon. Eric Kierans. I have read in the newspapers that Mr. Kierans is not too happy with what his former party has been doing in the years since he left. Neither are the other key people who bailed out of that party very happy with what is going on. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre might be happy, but they are not.

I go back to what Mr. Kierans was contemplating 11 years ago. He believed that the Post Office Department is an important communications facility in Canada which was being very strongly challenged by competitive communications technology. I see the Postmaster General talking to the current Minister of Communications (Mr. Fox). Possibly they are discussing electronic transmission of funds. If we are going to get that, and the government will have to decide sooner or later, we cannot wait for 12 years, as was done with regard to the post office mess. The government will have to decide soon on changes in legislation with respect to electronic communications.

If we get electronic funds transmission, there goes 75 per cent of the first class mail overnight. Where does that put the Post Office, even though it has become a Crown corporation? There are other competitors such as the private couriers. I know there will be a monopoly on letter carrier service, but that is not the money-making part of the Post Office. The United Parcel Service, UPS, has just received authority to carry out a total service in the province of Ontario. There are all sorts of competitors.

I had a parliamentary return tabled a few years ago which demonstrated that because of unreliable postal service most government departments were switching to private postal carriers rather than depending on the post office. I hope the Postmaster General will give attention to these important matters because if he does not, what he has done here today, which is 11 years too late, will do nothing to solve the problems in communications generally and in the postal service in particular.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of my colleague, the hon. member for Kootenay East-Revelstoke (Mr. Parker), I have been asked to outline the position of our party with regard to this bill which proposes to establish a separate Crown corporation to operate the Post Office. The first point I want to make is that we support this bill in principle and would like to see it go to the committee as quickly as possible. The bill is long overdue.

The concept of a Crown corporation to operate the Post Office has been around for a dozen or more years. In a study commissioned by the Post Office Department 11 years ago

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entitled "A Blueprint for Change", this was what was said about the idea of a Crown corporation. I quote:

We believe that the Crown corporation status is the organizational form best suited to the attainment of these objectives . . . As a Crown corporation, the Post Office should have full authority to bargain with the unions representing its employees. It should not be required to seek the approval of any government agency before concluding an agreement with unions. With such freedom, a strong effective staff relations function would be required to guide management in its relationships with unions.

● (1520)

There is no group which is more interested in the passage of this bill and the establishment of a Crown corporation than our unions in the Post Office because they have witnessed such devastating results due to the incompetence of those senior people in the Post Office Department who first negotiated with them back in the days when, as my hon. friend, the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale), said, Eric Kierans was the minister and, more recently, while the negotiations were carried out by the Treasury Board on behalf of the government.

I was shocked to read the announcement several days ago that the Treasury Board is taking over the negotiations with the letter carriers. There has been a very good and almost completely happy relationship between the Post Office Department and the letter carriers. There has been virtually no trouble, in contrast with relationship experienced between the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and the Post Office Department.

To a large extent the difficulties the postal workers had with the government arose as a result of the bullheaded, tough-minded and irrational attitude of the people in the Treasury Board. The Treasury Board did not confine that attitude to the postal workers. I remind hon. members that there have been strikes by the air traffic controllers because of the approach taken by the Treasury Board. Recently there was a strike by a group which most people in Canada thought would never strike or ever think of striking, one which would never even think very hard about belonging to a union or an association. I refer to the clerks. Why did the clerks strike? They went on strike because the Treasury Board in its stupidity offered them a 5 per cent increase in a year when the cost of living went up by 10 per cent.

When I read the announcement that the Treasury Board was taking over negotiations with the letter carriers, I almost resigned myself to a strike two or three months down the road. I hope we get this bill passed. I hope we get the Crown corporation set up, because when that happens the workers in the Post Office will no longer come under the jurisdiction of the Public Service Staff Relations Act and have to deal with the stupidities of the Treasury Board. They will come under the provisions of the Canada Labour Code and have all the rights afforded to workers in private industry to negotiate fairly not only on wages but also on working conditions, classification and all the other things which are accepted as commonplace in private industry.

Mr. Deans: Why is the Treasury Board so anti-people?